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SONG OF GOD

- 신의 노래 -

- VOLUME 1 -

-AUTHOR-

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- STORY -

It is said that humans only reveal 5% of their DNA. The person you perceive yourself to be and the person others judge you for is determined by this 5%. No one can know what is in the hidden 95%.

Put simply, it would be as if our parents gave us a total of 100 cards when they gave us life – of which only 5 can be used. They don't know which cards they'll be handing down, but that's not the real issue. The bigger problem is that of the 100 random cards, we can't even choose which of the 5 we get to use. We have to pick them with our eyes closed.

Now imagine each of these cards represents a different trait – maybe an attractive face, an intelligent mind, a great body, a handicap. A lucky person who might have been fated with a prized card would be able to use it as a weapon to speed through life with considerable ease. And then there are also the ill-fated who end up with a torn or useless card. Maybe all five cards are duds. But that is what we have to use to our advantage or disadvantage until we die.

This is a story about a boy, the “cards” he is dealt, and how he uses them to build a music empire.

Prologue

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The dictionary definition of absolute pitch is as goes.

Absolute Pitch: The ability to hear any musical note and, without a reference tone, recognize its pitch.

Absolute pitch is said to be a natural gift – something you are born with. But then there are some say that it is possible to acquire it with enough training. That it is more of a talent than a gift. But imagine being blessed with the gift of absolute pitch and enhancing an already impressive feat with another other talent. How extraordinary would that be?

The ability to extract the pitch from all sounds heard by the ear – the revving of a motorcycle exhaust, a frog croaking in the countryside on a cool summer night, the rattling of a subway into a platform, the sound of raindrops on the roof of a car – or to hear them as a beautiful melody in and of itself is indeed a gift from God.

But this is true only if that person realizes that the sounds he hears is music and not merely noise.

Of the 10 contemporary musicians chosen by New York's Metropolitan Museum to represent the 20th century, there is a South Korean who is a native of Sancheong and captain of Tongyoung – Mr. Yoon Yi Sang. He was born with such a gift.

He has said that the tranquil landscape and sea of Tongyoung he constantly yearned for are nestled in his music. A German couple who so loved Mr. Yoon Yi Sang's music said they traveled all the way to Tongyoung in order to feel his music on a deeper level.

And that German couple further said the moment they saw the sea in Tongyoung, they knew that it was the same sea they imagined while listening to Mr. Yoon Yi Sang's music. The music had expressed a natural landscape as if a picture had been taken.

Let us look at an incident from his childhood.

'When Spring comes and the paddy fills with water, it is filled with frogs. The sound of the frogs every night was very noisy but to me, it didn't sound like whining. Instead it was more like an artistic chorus composed of different voices.

When one frog starts crying, another sound matches that and responds, and if a third joins, suddenly a chorus of trebles, mids, and bass start in concert, and again suddenly fall silent.'

This is what is archived in Mr. Yoon Yi Sang's memorial in Tongyoung.

Hopefully, the readers who will see these words will not misunderstand. The purpose is not to write a biography about a man who has already passed away. Truthfully, I don't know much about the deceased man. I have never even heard his music. As someone who is used to pop music, difficult contemporary music is still an uncomfortable noise for me.

Going forward, I will tell the story of one young musician who appeared suddenly. He left humanity with music so beautiful it was like a gift from God. The young genius was associated with impressive modifiers of the 21st century such as Mozart, the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Chopin, and Quincy Jones, and was respected by the world.

This is a record of his music and the music empire that he built.

Chapter 1

The birth of a first child usually brings parents boundless joy. This is especially the case in Korean society where the birth of a son gives the mother reassurance and the father a little more happiness than a daughter does. A son means being able to pass on their lineage, and words are insufficient to express how the grandfather and grandmother feel from a grandchild.

Now if a particularly handsome baby is born – why the parents will jump up and down with joy.

However, there are the few parents who think that their first child's birth signifies nothing short of a disaster.

This was the case with the immature teen who forgot the gravity of pregnancy and the importance of contraceptives. When she finally found out about her pregnancy, unable to tell anyone, she trembled in fear and lost the chance for an abortion; ultimately becoming a single mother.

Of course not all single mothers are fools like this young woman. I am just telling you what happened in this one isolated incident.

The only things Jang Jun Hyuk received from his mother being a paper with his date of birth and his name, he was abandoned at an orphanage in Daegu before even having once tasting his mother's milk.

A nun of the Catholic foundation behind the orphanage looked after baby Jang Jun Hyuk, who rarely cried and was as cute as a kitten, with more love and care than his biological mother ever did or could.

Though it was unfortunate that he was abandoned by his mother, he was blessed with the orphanage's excellent facilities and the loving care of its nuns.

While it was impossible to know when he was a newborn baby, as he reached an age when he started to toddle and could manage some sort of expression, it was evident that this endearing child was different from the other children.

At an age when he should have been playing with dolls or toys, he spent his days touching the mobile dangling from the ceiling. When he reached the age when he should have been playing with his friends, he spent all day listening to hymns on his CD player or to the sound of wind coming from the big tree standing in the yard of the orphanage.

“Jun Hyuk. Let’s play with your brothers. Why are you always alone?” said the head sister almost as if in reprimand.

“I need to be alone to hear the sounds, mom.”

“Sounds?”

“Yes. The sounds.”

“What sounds? The hymns?”

“The hymns are no longer any fun.”

“So what are fun sounds?”

“The sound of trees, the wind, and of my friends playing. Um... I also like the sound of eating. Ha ha.”

It meant that he knew how to train his ears to sounds. The sister suspected that Jun Hyuk may have received a gift from God and wanted to ask him more questions to test this, but was unable to continue due to his following words.

“The best sound is... the sound of crying while sleeping. When one person cries, the older or younger siblings all start to cry as well. The sound of everyone crying together is better than the songs of the cathedral choir. It’s different every single day.”

The head sister realized what Jun Hyuk’s real problem was. Jun Hyuk had never once cried for the parents whose faces he didn’t know as the other children had. And she left it at that.

Chapter 2

One day one of the nuns approached the head sister of the orphanage with a concerned expression.

“Head sister. You know Jun Hyuk.”

“Yes. What about Jun Hyuk?”

“Father said that... he behaved strangely during service.”

“Strange behavior? Jun Hyuk? What kind of strange behavior?”

“Well, apparently he kept changing the hymn as he sang it. At first, he thought Jun Hyuk was imitating the choir... but it was as if he was inserting chords...”

“Chords? Well, that’s not so strange. That just means Jun Hyuk is a good singer.”

The young sister was surprised by the smile that started creeping on the head sister’s face.

“No... no. That’s not it. I’m saying he changed the hymn completely. The words were the same and the rest was different.”

“Whew. You almost scared me for a moment. Don’t be so silly. That’s how kids are. They have a great imagination. There are a lot of kids who change the lyrics when they sing. How is that any different from changing the tune?”

The young sister could not say more because the head sister spoke so nonchalantly while waving her hand. The father had clearly spoken about it as if it were very important and something to be addressed immediately.

The young sister left the office thinking that if it were really a critical issue, the father would speak to the head sister himself. She wouldn’t bother with it anymore.

The head sister already knew that Jun Hyuk was very different from the other children. An unusual child cannot help but live an unusual life. It was difficult for Jun Hyuk’s

environment to be one that would guide his extraordinary talent in a good direction.

Regardless, it was impossible to give Jun Hyuk special treatment. The head sister's work ethic was that all children needed to be treated equally and she followed this firmly.

For Jun Hyuk... no, for all of the children, the best solution was for them to be adopted into good families.

Fortunately, there was a middle-aged couple who visited occasionally and they cared very much for Jun Hyuk. It was also said that this middle-aged couple didn't have any children and were planning for an adoption. Although they weren't rich, they were an ordinary couple financially stable enough to raise a child.

The head sister made up her mind to make the best choice for Jun Hyuk. That was to personally meet the middle-aged couple, ask what their intentions were, and show them what a good choice Jun Hyuk would be as their adoptive son.

Chapter 3

“How are you? Have you thought about it a bit?”

“Yes.”

The middle-aged couple came to the orphanage a month after the head sister had suggested Jun Hyuk’s adoption and started to speak cautiously.

“We deliberated on the issue very carefully. Though we think that we would become good parents to Jun Hyuk.....”

“Is there a problem?”

The head sister who had been monitoring the couple’s atmosphere felt unsettled by the trailing of their words. Could they be turning the adoption down?

“We get the feeling that Jun Hyuk isn’t opening up to us.”

“When we are speaking or playing, instead of doing it together, should we say it’s as though he is observing us? Strangely, we get that feeling.”

The couple took turns confessing their inner thoughts on Jun Hyuk.

“Could it be that you feel this way because Jun Hyuk by nature does not talk very much? Though he is young, should I say that he is a very deep child? Jun Hyuk is also very quiet and likes to ponder about things than to be wasteful with words.”

The couple faced each other. After a short while, the husband spoke.

“Will you talk to Jun Hyuk for us? If he says that he likes us and is willing to follow us, we do have the intention to adopt him.”

The head sister did not hide her happiness in the couple’s acceptance.

“Thank you. The both of you are really giving a great love.”

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"Jun Hyuk, what do you think? That man and woman say that they really like you."

"I like them too. They are very fast."

"Fast? Whatever do you mean, child?"

"Their sound. The man and woman make sounds very quickly. They're very funny sounds. Ha ha."

Looking at the innocent Jun Hyuk laughing about something as simple as sounds, it seemed necessary to teach him the meaning of adoption.

"Jun Hyuk. What do you think it'll be like to live with that man and woman? They would like to live with you."

"Why? That man and woman don't have fathers and mothers either? Will they be living here with us?"

"No, that's not it. You would go to live in their house. You would have parents."

He simply blinked at the words mom and dad, so the head sister decided to discuss what would catch Jun Hyuk's interest first.

"The couple raises animals. The majority are chickens, but there are also ducks and goats..."

"Okay. I'd like that."

Jun Hyuk smiled widely with his bright eyes and spoke loudly.

"What? You'd like it?"

"Yes. I want to go if there are a lot of animals."

"Jun Hyuk, you have to like the man and woman in order to go live with them. Not the animals."

"I like the man and I like the woman too."

The head sister thought that it would be better for Jun Hyuk to spend more time with the couple before going through with the adoption. She decided to finalize the adoption after they spent more time together and once both parties were sure of their choices.

After that, the couple started visiting the orphanage together or separately at least twice a week to spend the day with Jun Hyuk.

Seven to eight months went by like this and once May came when the heat became rampant midday, 5 year old Jang Jun Hyuk was adopted by the couple with a chicken farm on Gyeongbuk Number 7.

The man was awkwardly wearing a suit and the woman an airy dress, having gotten her hair done early in the morning at a salon. They picked Jun Hyuk up in their van and left the orphanage as the other children looked on enviously.

This was especially the case as it was May 5th, Children's Day. As Jun Hyuk had never been to an amusement park, they took him to one in Daegu to make it a special day.

With the loud music and the activity of Children's Day, Jun Hyuk acted like a 5 year old for the first time in the bustling noise. He patiently stood in the long line to ride the merry-go-round and ran around yelling excitedly. The couple had to hold his hand tightly and follow him around so as not to lose him.

They never said no to him because it was their first day as a family as well as Children's Day. The two who became parents that day and gave Jun Hyuk whatever he wanted.

They got in the car and left once it became evident that Jun Hyuk was tired after spending the entire day running around.

Not surprisingly, before even 10 minutes passed, Jun Hyuk was laid out in the back seat of the van sleeping comfortably. Once they got on the highway to Number 7, the man sped up the car.

"Honey. Should we stop at a rest area and eat a bowl of ramen?"

"Ramen? Why suddenly ramen?"

"After eating all of the sweets that Jun Hyuk likes, I feel like I'm going crazy because it's so greasy. I need to eat some ramen with red chili powder and ease my stomach.

Jun Hyuk is asleep, right?”

“Yes. He’s even snoring.”

The sleeping Jun Hyuk was so cute with his shallow snoring that the two smiled broadly.

“The rest area is just up ahead, so I’ll eat quickly and come back.”

“I’ll eat with you. The greasy food is bothering me as well.”

They had eaten things that they would usually only eat when they ate out. They had pasta for lunch, then foods that children like such as grilled squid with butter and sugared churros. To these two middle-aged people who were used to eating kimchi stew and soybean paste stew, the food was difficult to bear.

They parked at a highway rest area and checked again to make sure that he was sleeping. They could still hear his low snoring.

They left the window open slightly and ran to the rest area. When they had come out of the rest area after quickly emptying a bowl of spicy ramen each and buying water and juice at the convenience store, it was raining. They ran through the rain thinking of the rain that may have gone into the car through the small crack in the window. When they got to the car, the door was wide open and Jun Hyuk was gone.

Chapter 4

To the Jun Hyuk who had only been to the cathedral and nursery, the loud melody of a trot heard out at the highway rest area was a world of new sounds. He woke up to this incredible sound.

A bout of passing showers came down as if it had been planned. The sounds of the trot tune and the raindrops on the car roof drew Jun Hyuk out of the car.

Trot's bumping rhythm laid out the basic bass and the raindrops pounding the car hood were the elaborate music on top.

It was as if there were dozens of instruments playing at the same time in the parking lot of this highway rest area. Jun Hyuk was able to differentiate between the distinct sounds each raindrop made on every different type of car hood.

Drunk with the elaborate sound that the raindrops and cars made, Jun Hyuk ran around the parking lot forgetting that his clothes were wet. It was in the crisp chords, he heard a fine, thin treble. The sound came from a kitten that had found shelter from the rain under a car.

Jun Hyuk bent down and reached out his arm to get the kitten out and the scared kitten ran out into the rain.

Within moments, the rain-soaked parking lot had become a playground for hide-and-seek. Jun Hyuk chased the kitten laughing gleefully, and while his adoptive parents yelled for him, the shouts didn't carry far due to the sound of the music of the rain.

The byway next to the rest area building was the passage the employees used to commute to and from work. Jun Hyuk followed the kitten out of the rest area through this byway.

Jun Hyuk's adoptive parents had no idea that this had happened and lost their first child born from the heart within a day while the rest area speakers blasted the message that they were looking for Jun Hyuk.

Chapter 5

44 year old Yoon Kwang Hun was on the phone shouting.

“Hey! How can you do this so suddenly? What are we going to do about the customers if you cancel when we’ve been advertising with flyers for a month? Customers are already taking their seats!”

“Boss. Please be considerate of our circumstances. It’s our first broadcast request in 4 years. We came here urgently because the person who was supposed to go on broadcast canceled last minute as well. How can we miss this opportunity?”

“Damn. Isn’t that a program that doesn’t even get high viewer ratings? And... how can Kim Jung Soo go on that program at that age? That’s where trot elders in their 60s go to make petty cash. Are you crazy?”

“Not today. Pop singers from the 70s and 80s were also included today. Anyway, please excuse us just this one day. In exchange, we’ll promise two free shows next month. Okay? Let’s hang up now.”

Yoon Kwang Hun tried calling Kim Jung Soo’s manager again who had hung up, but only got the answering machine. He nervously put the receiver down and pulled out a cigarette.

“How many people are here?”

The waiter standing anxiously next to Yoon Kwang Hun eyed him apprehensively.

“There aren’t very many tables as it’s still early. Boss, what should we do?”

“What can we do! Take down all of the flyers outside and post an apology that today’s performance isn’t happening at the entrance. And you.”

“Yes.”

“You stand at the entrance and tell the people coming in that today’s show has been pushed to next week.”

“Okay.”

He took his anger out on his young employees. The young employees stood with their heads hanging as if they had done something wrong.

“Go and inform the people who have already ordered food and don’t charge them for the food.”

“Yes boss.”

The employee left and Yoon Kwang Hun took a drag of his cigarette.

“Damn damn damn, I need to stop doing this crap too. I’m getting too old for this.”

Chapter 6

Yoon Kwang Hun graduated from a prestigious Korean university and got his MBA at the reputable Stanley University in California. After, he became a successful fund manager on Manhattan's Wall Street.

At this time, a financial institution in Korea called Future Asset offered him a hefty salary, a sizable signing bonus, in addition to some generous incentives to scout him – and he accepted it without a second thought.

No matter how successful he was, it was difficult to compete with the white man as a person of color. What was it called again? The white male privilege? Another reason he took the offer was that his level of skill was slightly short to play in the major leagues like Wall Street.

After that, Yoon Kwang Hun's life was that of every man's fantasy. He drove a luxury foreign car, lived in a deluxe apartment in Gangnam, and went to the Gangnam room salons every night. The name-brand clothing he wore from head to toe cost almost as much as his car did.

He was the perfect man for gold diggers because he was young and professional, made a fortune, and was single. He had over 100 women's numbers saved on his phone. From an internet shopping mall fitting model to a TV announcer, an unemployed woman, and a young married woman were also among his to play with. Occasionally, he would have a celebrity's phone number that he would later delete.

No matter how beautiful a flower is, it cannot live past the summer. No matter how mighty an authority may be, it cannot live past 10 years. As such, since power isn't held by withstanding it, do not try to use power at your whim and do not fret to obtain it. This proverb can be applied to men in stock exchange. The extravagant days that he thought would be endless disappeared with the subprime mortgage financial crisis in the United States.

While planning a comeback after experiencing a huge loss, Yoon Kwang Hun was diagnosed with depression at a hospital where the Director happened to be his boss' best friend.

This news was delivered immediately to his workplace, Future Asset, and he received his dismissal papers the same day.

“You **holes. How can you fire me after all of the money that I’ve made for you?”

He made a scene and slammed the company door on his way out. I still have enough. There’s still enough money that I’ve saved and my skills haven’t rusted over yet. I can make an office by myself... No I can jump into the gamble that is the financial market from home. Isn’t it a gamble that not many people in Korea recognize?

Chapter 7

He lost two things in exactly 3 years. Money and health.

All he was left with was a bank balance that had been reduced to a measly \$1000 from what was once over \$10 million and a warning from his doctor that, because he had spent his days watching the HTS program while chain smoking, he would die if he did not quit smoking and start exercising now.

Though Yoon Kwang Hun was not a successful gambler, he was not stupid. He had admitted his defeat and left the table.

After he sold his house worth millions to settle his loans, he had about \$1 million left. For someone who survived such a great loss, it wasn't a bad result. He needed to be careful with his second challenge. He couldn't waste his remaining \$1 million.

At first, he thought of making a cafe in Hongdae or Sinchon. Music, coffee, and wine were Yoon Kwang Hun's only hobbies and he had wanted to spend the rest of his life surrounded by them.

However, the music that Yoon Kwang Hun liked had long become classics that wouldn't be popular in Hongdae and Sinchon. This became a reason to give up his tiny store with colossal rent.

Yoon Kwang Hun lost all of his nerve and had to admit that he was an old middle-aged man and needed to be more and more careful with the money he had left. The last place that he contracted was a refined live cafe.

Infested with middle-aged customers and the occasional irrelevant pop singers with one or two hits under their belts, the target customer was the person who wanted to listen to music while giving a farce of elegance with wine.

The practice did well enough for 6 months to make a comfortable living. Once the business slowed down, he was making the bare minimum to live off of. About a year passed like this and, as the contractors kept frequenting his cafe, Yoon Kwang Hun had to change its concept to another live cafe.

As another year passed, he found out that he had been swindled by the contractors. Though the menu prices were increased 5-fold on the days that singers performed, profits didn't increase. Eventually, his live cafe just became another cafe in Misari where he had to keep listening to the pop music of the 70s and 80s instead of the music that he liked.

Chapter 8

Whenever a singer cancels last minute like was done today, the number of customers decrease. After Kim Jung Soo's 50 year old fans ate their free food and left, all that was left were their leftovers.

Yoon Kwang Hun closed the cafe early for the night and sipped on a bottle of wine alone. He should have kept the business going on its original concept. Due to his greed, his body was tired and his mind was uncomfortable. As he was calculating the cost of returning the interior decoration to its prior state, he heard a loud noise from the dumpster. It sounded like the stray cats were going through the garbage again. Every time those cats went through the dumpster, the garbage was left in an unbearable state.

Yoon Kwang Hun set his wine glass down and ran out of the kitchen. Instead of a stray cat, there was a child dripping in water with his head in the dumpster, shoving pieces of leftover steak in his mouth.

"Hey, what are you doing?"

The boy became startled at Yoon Kwang Hun's yell and ran away like a bullet with pieces of meat in both hands.

"Are there kids like that these days?"

Kids groveling in the street were a vague memory. A long time ago, it used to be common for children to beg in the train stations or on the street, but they had pretty much disappeared since online games became popular. It was said that these kids now spent their time pharming online games in a warehouse somewhere.

Since the child was someone else's problem, he forgot about him and started cleaning up the garbage. He went back into the cafe and started drinking the wine again to think about redesigning the cafe, but kept thinking of the little boy's handsome face and couldn't concentrate.

Yoon Kwang Hun went into the kitchen, took out two tonkatsu cutlets from the freezer, and started frying them.

“Ugh, my situation isn’t any better so what am I doing thinking of someone else?”

As he was grumbling like this and thinking about how hungry the child must have been that he had gone through the garbage, he kept cooking.

He put a few tonkatsu cutlets and three or four bananas that were supposed to be used as snacks in a bag and left it by the dumpster.

“Hey! I’m leaving this out for you to eat, so take it before the stray cats do!”

He wasn’t sure if the kid was still in the vicinity, but he called out loudly and went back into the cafe. He thought that with this, the sympathy and remorse he couldn’t help but feel would go away.

After about 10 minutes, there was a rustling sound and then silence. He quietly stepped outside to make sure the stray cats hadn’t taken the food left out for the little boy.

Yoon Kwang Hun saw the little boy running away with the bag of food in his hands and his heart became a little lighter.

He forgot the depressing thoughts he had earlier and turned his favorite CD on loudly. All he wanted to do was have some time to himself with music and wine.

He lost himself in the music and as it was reaching its peak, he saw a face stuck to the cafe window. He was startled by the head floating like a ghost’s, but once he recognized it as the head of the little boy who ran away with the bag of food, he calmed down.

He went out thinking that the boy had come to say thank you for the food, but he remained stuck to the window without realizing that Yoon Kwang Hun was standing next to him. Once Yoon Kwang Hun tapped his shoulder, he finally knew that someone was next to him and ran like lightning.

He just watched the boy in shock, but the boy stopped and came back towards Yoon Kwang Hun.

“Thank you.”

He bowed in greeting and the sight of him holding the paper bag made Yoon Kwang

Hun's heart tremble again.

"Hey. Come in. You didn't even get to drink water after eating the tonkatsu and bananas, right? Your throat is probably dry... I didn't think of that earlier. You're probably thirsty, so come in and have a glass of water."

The little boy who had been flitting his eyes back and forth followed Yoon Kwang Hun into the cafe. Looking at his messy hair, clothing dripping in dirty water, and face, it seemed like he hadn't been able to wash himself in at least a year.

The beggar-like little boy sat down cautiously and he drank the whole bottle of water he was given. Watching the boy drink water, he could guess he was still hungry.

"Hey. Are you still hungry? Do you want me to make you more tonkatsu? Will you eat it?"

He went back to the kitchen after the boy's eyes became big and he nodded his head vigorously. He first fried one cutlet and handed it to the boy in a plate.

Yoon Kwang Soo watched the boy chewing the cutlet in his hand instead of cutting it up and asked,

"Hey. What's your name?"

"Jang... Jang Jun Hyuk."

The sight of the child saying his name with a mouth full of tonkatsu was even more pitiful.

"Do you want to eat more?"

Jun Hyuk nodded his head heartily as though he had been waiting for it.

Yoon Kwang Hun went to the kitchen, fried the rest of the tonkatsu, and put it on a plate. From the way he was eating, it seemed like he could eat enough for 10 people.

Jang Jun Hyuk saw the plate with more than 10 tonkatsu cutlets, and he couldn't speak. He ate and ate until he was nauseous. It was like a bear filling his stomach after a winter of hibernation.

“If you can’t eat anymore, you can stop. I’ll pack up the rest for you so you can eat it later.”

Jun Hyuk put his fork down once he heard that he could take the rest of the food.

“Did you run away?”

“Excuse me?”

“Did you run away from home?”

“Oh, no. I don’t have a home.”

“What? You don’t have a home? What does that mean?”

“I’m an orphan. An orphan without a home or parents.”

“How old are you?”

“I’m not sure. 15? 16?”

“Did you run away from somewhere like a nursery or an orphanage?”

“I lived in an orphanage run by nuns when I was young, but I’ve been living on the streets since I was 5 years old.”

“Why!?”

Yoon Kwang Hun was so surprised that he yelled without realizing it. Goodness! How are there still children like this? And looking at his age, it means that he’s been living in the streets for 10 years... This was something that he could not begin to understand.

“Hey... mister. It just happened. Do I have to tell you everything?”

There was no need to rub salt in the wounds of a child he met today. It was just out of curiosity. Yoon Kwang Hun began to think that he had made a mistake.

“Alright. You don’t have to tell me. I asked something useless.”

Though it was a situation where one person had done a good deed and the other

person should be thankful, there was only silence. This awkward situation disappeared because of Jun Hyuk's words.

"But mister. What is that music you just turned on?"

The speaker was already quiet. Yoon Kwang Hun hadn't even realized that the CD track had finished.

"Oh, that? That's Mahler. Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 5. That was recorded when Georg Schulte used to lead the Chicago Orchestra. It's my favorite."

Jun Hyuk only blinked his eyes. There weren't any words that he could understand in Yoon Kwang Hun's explanation.

"Yes. Well... Anyway, thank you for the tonkatsu."

Yoon Kwang Hun saw Jun Hyuk rising from his seat and spoke.

"Hey. Do you want to listen to it again? From here, not from outside. From the beginning."

"Really?"

Jun Hyuk seemed like a strange boy because he smiled more brightly at that than he did when he ate until he was full as he sat back down on the sofa.

Yoon Kwang Hun put the CD in and turned the volume back up. As the music flowed out, Jang Jun Hyuk closed his eyes and listened closely. He had been sitting on the sofa tensely with a straight back, but he changed his position comfortably so that he was seated back.

When the music ended again, Jun Hyuk burst out in admiration.

"It's incredible he included that many sounds in 66 minutes and 10 seconds. It sounds much better than when I was listening from outside."

"What? What did you just say? 66 minutes?"

"No. 66 minutes and 10 seconds."

"What's 66 minutes and 10 seconds?"

“The road. The music’s road. You know? How long it was playing.”

Yoon Kwang Hun jumped up from his seat and looked at the CD case that he had thrown next to the CD player. It was clearly printed that the running time was 66 minutes and 8 seconds.

“You... How did you know the running time? Did you measure it on the clock?”

“What time?”

“Running time. The performance time.”

“I just know it.”

“You just knew it? Automatically?”

“Yes. I just knew it.”

Yoon Kwang Hun couldn’t believe this beggar-like teenage boy. When Zubin Mehta was leading the New York Philharmonic, there was a legend that he matched the running times exactly every time he conducted Beethoven’s symphonies.

However, it may be possible because he listened to Beethoven hundreds of thousands of times to interpret it for the orchestra he was conducting. But figuring out the running time just by listening to it? Yoon Kwang Hun shook his head back and forth. It was impossible. Did it mean that there was a stopwatch or metronome embedded in his head?

Jun Hyuk’s feminine face didn’t show any sign that there was something strange. It didn’t seem like he was lying and there was no reason for him to lie.

Yoon Kwang Hun swallowed and asked again,

“Do you by any chance remember the entire song you just heard?”

“Yes. When I was listening from outside, I wasn’t sure because it wasn’t clear, but I just remembered the whole song.”

Yoon Kwang Hun’s sight became fuzzy. Mahler’s Symphony No. 5 isn’t a widely known work like Beethoven’s symphony Fate was. No matter how many times he had heard

it, there was no way for him to memorize the whole song unless he had majored in classical music. No, among classical music majors, how many of them could have completely memorized all of the parts to a symphony? Even Yoon Kwang Hun who had listened to the song hundreds of times could only remember the melody. It wasn't even that he memorized it, but he just remembered it.

Yoon Kwang Hun asked carefully,

"Do you... want to try it? Remembering it?"

"How? There's just the sound."

"Exactly. Um... You can make the same sounds. Bam ba bam ba, or turururu... in this way."

Yoon Kwang Hun's heart beat faster and his whole body felt weak at the thought that there was an extraordinary person in front of his eyes. Jang Jun Hyuk thought for a while and eventually grimaced.

"I can't do it."

Of course not. What a ridiculous lie! Unless he was the reincarnation of Mozart, it was impossible. He didn't know why, but he relaxed and his mind found comfort.

But Jang Jun Hyuk's words that he could not do it were not the last.

"There are 106 sounds... Doesn't that mean there are 106 instruments? How can I personally make each of those sounds?"

He tensed up again at the shock and became uncomfortable again. Even more than he had been before. It felt like all the blood in his body had rushed to his head.

If this child was not lying, the reincarnation of Mozart was standing in front of him. No, he was even more impressive than Mozart. Mozart had memorized Allegri's 'Miserere Mei, Deus' after hearing it for the first time when he was 14 years old.

This song had been sealed by the Pope, so it was only performed at the Sistine Chapel. Revealing the sheet music for this song and singing it outside of the chapel was strictly forbidden, but 14 year old Mozart heard it once and wrote it perfectly.

However, that music lasted just 10 minutes. It didn't compare to this small child's ability.

"Are you saying that knowing what it means? Are you saying that you memorized all the parts in an orchestra after hearing a song once?"

"Mister... Say a random time."

"A time? What time?"

"Any time in the 66 minutes."

Yoon Kwang Hun figured out the kid's intent.

"Minute 37."

"At minute 37, there were eight sounds. From minute 33 to 41, eight instruments played. I don't really know names of instruments....."

Even classical music enthusiast Yoon Kwang Hun had no way of confirming Jun Hyuk's response because he did not have the ability to separate the sounds as such. He may be able to check if he were looking at the sheet music.

Looking at Jun Hyuk's innocent face, it was difficult to think that he was lying. Jun Hyuk bowed his head to Yoon Kwang Hun who could not recover from the shock and stood up.

"Mister. Thank you for the tonkatsu."

Jun Hyuk did not forget the plastic bag with the tonkatsu and held it tightly in his hand. Yoon Kwang Hun had the thought that he must do something, but he could not think of what it was. In the midst of his reluctance and hesitation, Jang Jun Hyuk was opening the cafe door.

"Hey, kid! What did you say your name was?"

"Jang Jun Hyuk."

"Right, Jang Jun Hyuk. If you want to eat tonkatsu, come back. I'll make it deliciously."

Jun Hyuk bowed his farewell again and left the cafe.

Yoon Kwang Hun stared blankly at the door Jang Jun Hyuk had left through for a few minutes. Once he came to his senses, he started pulling his hair.

“Ah, crap. What are you doing!”

He was cursing at himself. How could he be so stupid? No matter how shocked he was, how could he have sat here blankly while a young Mozart went out into the rain with nowhere to go?

He must find the boy. He couldn't confirm yet, but he needed to know if the boy was a diamond or a coal. Even if he was not a diamond, their fates had crossed and he could not let leave such a young child alone in this situation.

Chapter 9

Once Jun Hyuk came out of the cafe, he needed to get out of the neighborhood. If those guys caught him again, there was no way that they would let him live.

The guys he mugged a few days ago had clearly looked like good students. They wore their uniforms neatly and looking at their heavy bags, it seemed like they carried their books with them. He had followed them quietly and called the two into a quiet place. After he hit them a few times, they had obediently given him everything in their wallets. Everything was okay even as he was leaving with a few tickets to the museum and \$30.

\$30 was enough to suppress hunger for 10 days with two rice rolls a day from Kimbap Heaven. He could make enough to buy cup ramen if he sold the museum tickets to children at the internet cafe.

Before he made it inside the internet cafe, the students appeared with their friends, and Jun Hyuk barely managed to run away from the kids.

He had bothered the wrong people. It seemed like these kids did not even attend school. Jun Hyuk saw them looking for him near the prep schools all morning.

Since he could not go into the area with all of the prep schools, he could not even buy a triangular rice roll. When he was famished, the best place to find food was the area with all of the cafes. Because the cafe area was not downtown and they were not all placed closely next to each other, it was easy to approach them inconspicuously. There were also cafes that did not serve soups and had dry foods. Of the places that dumped all of their leftover food in a separate barrel, the ones with soups mixed with everything else had made it all impossible to eat.

Yoon Kwang Hun was one of the only people who removed liquids while throwing out the food due to his clean nature. Jun Hyuk usually went through the garbage right before the collection trucks came when the cafes were closed for the night but he could not wait this time – he had starved for days. And that was how the two had finally met.

‘Let me get just \$50 more and I’ll leave this neighborhood.’

If he had just \$50 more, he could hold out long enough to figure out the situation in a new neighborhood. Jang Jun Hyuk started walking towards the area with the prep schools again.

Chapter 10

Jun Hyuk wandered cautiously around the middle school. There were kids who roamed into the back streets after school to smoke.

Jun Hyuk's radar caught 4 schoolgirls. Two were smoking cigarettes and two were distracted by their smart phones.

"Where do you girls think you're smoking?"

Jun Hyuk turned around after he had pretended to be passing by and punched the two girls who were smoking. He then smacked the two girls who had been looking at their phones and took their phones.

He knew that he had succeeded when he saw the girls were recoiling in fear. Even without using force, Jun Hyuk's long hair, dirty and worn clothing, and odor were enough to scare the young schoolgirls.

"Hurry up and take the money out of your wallets or I'll break these phones."

As he raised the phone to smash it to the floor, the owner clumsily took her wallet out and handed it to him. The two girls who had been smoking before Jun Hyuk punched them were standing with their hands to their cheeks, unable to lift their heads.

"Damn. What are you guys doing? Hurry up and take out your money."

He kicked the two girls slumped on the floor a few times and they took out their wallets. He shoved the money from the four girls' wallets into his pocket and quickly fled out of the alley, towards the main street.

All he had in his pocket were a few dollar bills and one 5 dollar bill. Maybe it was because they were middle schoolers, but there wasn't one 10 dollar bill.

When he came out onto the main street and some boys who weren't in uniforms walking with some in uniforms looked at Jun Hyuk in surprise.

"That... that bastard... isn't he that bastard?"

Jun Hyuk recognized them as the guys who had been going around looking for him right away and ran back into the alley.

“Hey! Catch that kid!”

Jun Hyuk’s heart started beating as wildly as the countless footsteps that were chasing him.

Chapter 11

“Boss, the places where kids like that go are obvious. Internet cafes, comic book cafes, or saunas. But if he’s as dirty as you say he was, he probably wouldn’t go to the sauna. Those kinds of kids also hang around the area with the prep schools. That way, they can mug middle school or elementary school students.”

All he had to go on was information from his young employee. Yoon Kwang Hun took his employee’s word and walked around the prep school area.

After wandering the area for a few days, he heard girls cry out in the direction of the main street. Teenagers were running from where the screaming had sounded.

He spied the long hair of a boy running away. Yoon Kwang Hun was sure that it was Jun Hyuk and ran after him.



“Get up kid. You didn’t even get hurt that badly. Are you making a big deal out of a few scratches on your back?”

“Oh, mister.”

When Jun Hyuk opened his eyes, he found himself lying in an unfamiliar room. He was disorientated at first, but quickly recalled yesterday’s events.

He remembered Yoon Kwang Hun yelling at the kids beating him to stop, but they both ended up getting hit. If it can be considered fortunate, it was fortunate that the beating did not last long because an adult had interfered.

“Even if you break a bone at your age, if you eat well.....”

Yoon Kwang Hun quickly stopped. Wasn’t he like a stray cat, unable to eat properly? He couldn’t talk about food to a child like that.

“Anyway, sleep a bit more. We’ll talk later.”

As he was closing the door to the tiny room, he stopped and left it wide open instead. Music accented with a compelling yet rough voice spilled through the door like sunshine coming through a window.

“Listen to the music carefully. Listen to how long it is.”

“What is this?”

“Lynyrd Skynyrd. This is probably the first time you’re hearing it.”

Chapter 12

After a night of deep sleep, his body felt light. The only signs that something had happened were his bloated face and stiff, bandaged back.

“You’re awake now? How do you feel?”

“Oh, mister. Yes... I’m okay.”

“You must be hungry. Sit there and I’ll make you something to eat.”

Jun Hyuk sat uncomfortably in a corner of the cafe. He had only seen the boss on the first day when he ate the tonkatsu, but there were two young people cleaning and preparing the hall now. He could also see the boss making something next to the chef in the kitchen.

The two young employees cleaning the hall kept glancing over at Jun Hyuk as well. Yoon Kwang Hun came out with a plate once that attention started to become uncomfortable.

“Eat this first and ease your stomach. We’ll eat more heartily for dinner.”

Jun Hyuk only noticed that something was wrong with Yoon Kwang Hun’s face after he had scarfed down the porridge.

“But mister. Your face?”

“Oh, this? Those high schoolers hit me a little yesterday. At any rate, I thought you would be able to fight a bit but you couldn’t.”

“If we fought properly, I would have won for sure. What can I do when they’re all ganging up on me? I could have run away if it weren’t for you but you came.....”

“Hey kid! Your tone is different after being saved. Ha ha.”

Jun Hyuk wanted to thank Yoon Kwang Hun who was laughing with a bruised face, but he lost his chance to show his gratefulness because of his next words because they

were entirely unexpected.

“Do you want to work here?”

“Excuse me?”

“You don’t have a place to go anyway. You can sleep in that small room and since this is a cafe, your meals won’t be a problem.”

Yoon Kwang Hun had considered taking Jun Hyuk home as well, but the cafe was better suited if he wanted to be surrounded by music at any time of the day. Yoon Kwang Hun’s CD collection and the audio system he had spent thousands on were at the cafe. If Jun Hyuk even wanted to make ramen at the house, he would have to be careful of Yoon Kwang Hun, but if he were alone at the cafe, he could go into the refrigerator at any time and eat whatever he wanted.

“But what type of work?”

“Instead of dealing with the customers, preparing to open for business and cleaning the hall and kitchen after closing. That’s it. What do you think?”

“So you’re telling me to just prepare and clean, right?”

“That’s right. Isn’t it completely ideal?”

He thought Jun Hyuk would be jumping for joy at the offer of simply cleaning in exchange for food and shelter, but he had a strange expression that was neither positive nor negative. What’s more, the expression did not look favorable either.

“Excuse me, mister. Tell me honestly. What do you want from me?”

“What? What do you mean?”

“There’s no adult who gives out food and shelter for free. There’s no such thing as free food.”

His eyes were full of distrust. His lips were forming a slight smile.

Adults made a young child like this. Could it be that he had never experienced kindness and goodwill?

“That... that... Whew~.”

Yoon Kwang Hun stopped talking to depress this horrible feeling. How had the world treated this 15 year old boy and what awful tribulations had he endured on his way here?

Yoon Kwang Hun had so many questions, but did not want to revisit old wounds like they had done the last time. Instead, he told Jun Hyuk what he needed to do going forward slowly and clearly.

“Listen carefully, Jun Hyuk. There are also adults who give hungry children free lunch without expecting anything in return. And it’s not free, is it? I’m making you clean.”

Jun Hyuk’s expression was that of disbelief. No matter how hard he searched his memory, there had never been a person who treated him like this without expecting something in return. He felt Yoon Kwang Hun’s sincerity in the way he was speaking clearly as if he were upset.

“But why are you being nice to me?”

“Um... let me think. How should I say it?”

Yoon Kwang Hun thought for a moment about how he could say it in a way that would help Jun Hyuk understand.

“You have a tremendous talent that you don’t know about. I don’t know how extensive it is either. I want to see that talent and I don’t want it to disappear.”

“By chance, can I hear... I mean, do I have a talent in music?”

“So far it seems so. It could be an incredible talent.”

“I see.”

Jun Hyuk hung his head. Yoon Kwang Hun could guess why his head was hanging and went on speaking.

“Even if you don’t have a talent, let’s live here together until you’re an adult. I’m alone and you’re alone.”

Jun Hyuk finally lifted his head and thanked him.

“Thank you, mister. I’ll make sure to be successful with my music and repay your kindness.”

“You’re embarrassing me... Forget about that. And you’re not just playing around. You really have to start studying hard.”

“Excuse me? Study?”

“Yea, study. You’ve never been to school, right?”

“No.”

“So you won’t know hangul?”

“No.”

“Hey, it’s fine. It’s not something to be ashamed of. It’s natural that you don’t know it if you’ve never learned it.”

Yoon Kwang Hun hit the back of Jun Hyuk’s once again hanging head.

“When the cafe opens in the morning, go to your room and sleep. Sleep well and you can listen to music when you get up. We can study together after the cafe is closed. We’ll learn hangul and sheet music.”

“Sheet music?”

“Yea. Sheet music makes it possible to read sounds.”

“Sounds?”

“Yes. It means you’re recording the pitch and length of sounds. And since you don’t know tones yet, you’ll need to learn an instrument. You need to know the different sounds instruments make.”

“Then... if I learn sheet music, I’ll be able to write down the sounds I think of?”

‘Exactly. This is it.’

Yoon Kwang Hun felt a shiver run through his body. There's definitely music unique to this child in his head. Yoon Kwang Hun wanted to see that music. He needed to know if this child was Mozart reincarnated or if he just had absolute pitch, a sense for tempo, and amazing memorization.

If Jun Hyuk was not talented in composition, he would need to receive professional training. Yoon Kwang Hun thought this far ahead and started to worry. How much money would this cost?

"Jun Hyuk, you can think about making music slowly. You need to listen to a lot of it before that. As you listen to a lot of music, it'll become clear how you can make the sounds that you are thinking of."

With that, Jun Hyuk started to live at the cafe.

Chapter 13

He walked through the cafe door early in the morning and the soft melody of a guitar was floating around. Jun Hyuk sat in the middle of the cafe and stirred the air with his fingers without realizing that Yoon Kwang Hun had walked in. It seemed like he was following the guitar's melody with his finger.

Yoon Kwang Hun waited until the CD track was over. When the music ended and the cafe became quiet, Jun Hyuk's eyes opened wide and he ran over to the closet packed with CDs.

"You need to stop and work, right? What are you doing instead of preparing the cafe for business?"

"Ah... Boss."

Jun Hyuk finally realized that Yoon Kwang Hun had come in and bowed to the cafe owner. Since it had been decided that he would start working, the first thing to change was the way he referred to the man. Yoon Kwang Hun also thought that it would be better for Jun Hyuk to call him that than mister so that he could gain a sense of responsibility and seriousness.

"Did you listen to music all night?"

"Yes, boss. But who is this person? Someone who plays the guitar?"

"Why? You like it? Jeff Beck. He's a British guitarist."

Jun Hyuk brought another CD and handed it to Yoon Kwang Hun.

"What about this person? This person playing the piano."

"Glenn Gould. I guess you heard Bach's Goldberg Variations. It's incredible."

Yoon Kwang Hun held the CD that Jun Hyuk handed him and smiled slightly. Jun Hyuk had fully taken his words to listen to all music without prejudice into consideration – rock, the blues, classical, etc.

“So? You haven’t answered my question. You didn’t sleep last night?”

“No.”

“Hurry up and get the cafe ready so you can go in and sleep.”

As Yoon Kwang Hun was about to drink a cup of coffee, Jun Hyuk came carefully to his side.

“Excuse me.”

“Yea. What?”

“Can you teach me english before hangul? All of the music is in english. It’s so frustrating to be unable to read the CDs.”

[TN] hangul is korean for... well, korean.]

“It isn’t important who the people are. Just start by listening. Whatever it is. For now, it’s important that you listen to a variety of music.”

He couldn’t even write properly in hangul yet. Yoon Kwang Hun was also frustrated because he could not comprehend why someone who learned music scores so easily was having such difficulty memorizing the Korean alphabet.

However, it was obvious that he had been born with his talent for musical instruments. He remembered music he heard for the first time perfectly and could identify each sound by their instrument. All that was left to work on was the skill.

When he held a Gibson Les Paul electric guitar, he remembered all 22 frets, 6 series, or 132 sounds perfectly. After he memorized the chords, he didn’t need to look at music scores to play any guitar performance.

Yoon Kwang Hun had purchased the Blu-Ray of a world famous guitarist because he was unable to play an instrument himself. After Jun Hyuk watched these guitarists’ live performances and saw how they handled their instruments, his own skill on the guitar improved steadily.

During the first year spent at the cafe, Jun Hyuk only played the piano and guitar. He slept once he finished preparing the cafe for business and listened to music from the

moment he woke up in the afternoon. Once the cafe closed at 10 at night and he was done cleaning up, he practiced the piano and guitar until morning.

Yoon Kwang Hun was able to witness Jun Hyuk's gift every day. He never once rested and even if he had practiced for 10 hours, he said that those 10 hours were short. It seemed as though he could not believe that the time had gone by so quickly.

Talent meant devoting oneself so much so that time is forgotten.

Jun Hyuk had reached the level where he could imitate anywhere from B.B. King's blues to Yngwie Malmsteen. After another year passed, he could play the piano so well that a passerby would think that he had majored in classical music.

Music scores accumulated faster than his guitar and piano skills increased. He had now moved on from listening and imitating to creating his own music. The scores ranged from short instrumentals to the 40 minute symphony that he had wrestled with for over a month before its completion. Once he finished a song, he didn't look at it again because he would write another song come tomorrow anyway.

"Jun Hyuk, what's this song? To be honest, it's a bit bothersome."

It sounded as though there was a dissonance through the introduction that was almost uncomfortable to listen to. Of course, it could also be attributed to the fact that Yoon Kwang Hun had not been properly educated and could not imagine the melodies played by all of the instruments in an orchestra. He closed the score before going through very many of the sheets. He was not sure why, but he found the discomfort and uneasiness unbearable.

"You think so? I really like it."

"It's too experimental. What is it that you were trying to express?"

"Um... was it when I was 10 years old? It was when I was begging on the streets while singing gospels... I was beaten with a belt because I hadn't brought in enough money. It was the first time I had been beaten so severely... and I passed out. The fear and pain I felt then and the frustration of not knowing when the beatings would stop? I tried remembering those feelings. I ended that song at the point where I had fainted. It doesn't seem right?"

How could he talk about such a harrowing experience with a smile on his face.....

Yoon Kwang Hun felt even more uncomfortable than when he had been looking at the music score. From what had been occasionally disclosed to him over the last two years, it seemed Jun Hyuk's street life had been more dramatic than a soap opera or a movie. He came to know that reality was more miserable and gruesome than an author could put into expression.

Chapter 14

Piano lessons were what Yoon Kwang Hun had hesitated most on. In popular music, it was possible to succeed as a self-taught guitarist, but pianists in the classical world received systematic lessons under tremendous maestros.

Honestly, he had not wanted to leave Jun Hyuk with some random professor from a Korean university, but he also did not have the means to get Jun Hyuk lessons from a highly reputable pianist.

However, Jun Hyuk himself made these worries go away.

He couldn't stop the tears when Jun Hyuk played Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto. He had delivered a real pianist's performance with a personal and emotional interpretation of the music rather than that of someone who plays robotically from the score.

It was evident that he was short on practice with frequently missed notes, and he did not show the techniques that would have been developed with formal lessons.

'Should I just hire a piano teacher?'

Yoon Kwang Hun did not have the connections in Korea to find a decent college professor, so he started searching for a pianist who had studied abroad and was making a living on tutoring.

Chapter 15

Go Sae Won went to France at age 23 and traveled Europe learning to play piano for 15 years – even taking part in the Poland Chopin Competition. He had not earned a high score, but he had received enthusiastic applause from the youth.

Though he started at a much later age than the gifted pianists who had started at age 3 and 5, there was a greater passion in his music that was in the music of the young geniuses.

As a graduate of a university in the countryside, there was no place for him in his homeland. Unless he had been extremely successful in Europe, he could only be undervalued and spurned as he lacked the proper connections.

He knew as soon as he heard Jang Jun Hyuk's piano, that his pride, passion, and efforts so far were really nothing.

Go Sae Won spoke after he heard Jun Hyuk play Chopin's 'Farewell' and was so touched that his hands were shaking.

"Has... Has it really only been two years since you started playing piano?"

"Yes."

Chopin himself had said that he could never produce another melody as beautiful as that of 'Farewell,' a song capturing his feelings for his homeland, Poland. Jun Hyuk expressed Chopin's longing for his country and his loneliness effortlessly.

"But why have you brought this child to me?"

"I brought him so that he might receive lessons from you. If you can see talent in him to teach..."

"Teach? Talent? What can you teach a child like that? It has only been two years since he started playing the piano by himself and he can digest Chopin. I'm saying there will be less than ten people on this Earth who have the qualifications to teach that boy."

“Ten people? You lower our Jun Hyuk too much. Ha ha.”

Yoon Kwang Hun must have liked Go Sae Won’s evaluation, because he laughed brightly and showed his relaxed state of mind.

“This man really! Are you playing games with me?”

“I meant it as a joke... I apologize if you were offended. It is the truth that I came here to ask you to give Jun Hyuk lessons.”

“What lessons? A few minor mistakes and bad habits? Lessons from me to fix those? You can ask a college student majoring in piano for that. He already knows all of the really important things... I have nothing to teach him.”

Go Sae Won’s words were sincere. He had nothing to teach Jun Hyuk, a pianist who could interpret music’s message and deliver it with emotion.

“Even with a diamond in the rough, don’t you have to buff and clean it to get to the light and have it reborn as a jewel? I am asking you for that.”

Go Sae Won had the thought that becoming Jang Jun Hyuk’s first teacher and being the person to lay down his foundation might be considered one of his musical achievements later.

That was when Jun Hyuk started to learn the basics twice a week at Go Sae Won’s house.

Just how far will Jun Hyuk go?

Chapter 16

The only thing Yoon Kwang Hun taught now was english. His goal was for there to be no difficulty in Jun Hyuk's ability to communicate in english. In exchange, Jun Hyuk paid Yoon Kwang Hun with something much greater everyday.

He had the privilege to be the first to appreciate the new music that he made and the first to listen to his piano and guitar performances. Jun Hyuk played rock music for him when he was drinking beer and jazz when he was drinking wine.

Jun Hyuk started listening to other maestros' music less and less. Instead, he spent more time making his own music.

Also, it had already been a year since Yoon Kwang Hun changed his business from a place for washed out pop singers performing live to a music cafe. This was the cafe he had originally envisioned. One with music, coffee, and wine. And finally the profits slowly started rolling in. But that was also on due to Jun Hyuk.

Jun Hyuk played the piano for one hour every day at the cafe and the customers' reactions were better than expected. He was not performing played out classical music, but remade pop songs that the customers liked. Not only that, but he improvised the music to the customers' requests of ballads as jazz, trot, and blues.

When rumors spread that there was a young and handsome pianist performing at the cafe, the customer base that used to be women in their 40s became women in their 30s, after which even young customers in their 20s started to come.

Jun Hyuk looked like an adult over 20 with his tall height and long curly hair. The customers sighed in regret when they were told that he was only 17 years old, but they remained as regular patrons.

Jun Hyuk's name started to float around the internet as the Kang Dong Won of Misari.

[TN]: Kang Dong Won – Famous korean actor

Once customers started uploading videos of Jun Hyuk playing the piano on blogs and YouTube, even high school girls started to come to the cafe and Yoon Kwang Hun was

forced to put up a sign forbidding entry to minors.

As the views on the videos went up, more customers came to visit the cafe, and entertainment agencies eventually started to approach them. They didn't care for Jun Hyuk's piano playing. They had come to see his long arms and legs, and his small and handsome face – something that would sell to the general public.

“Sir, I would like to introduce myself.”

The same words always followed after the business cards.

“Can I meet the pianist?”

When the people from the entertainment agencies saw Jun Hyuk in his t-shirt and jeans, they burst out in admiration.

“Wow... Even his look is enough.”

“Goodness. He would look so cool next to Kang Dong Won.”

Jun Hyuk's height was not noticeable in the videos. He had gone through a growth spurt over the past two years – aided by the fact that Yoon Kwang Hun always made sure that he was fed. It was obvious that they were interested in Jun Hyuk.

“There's an idol band that our company is trying to debut. We were thinking of a 5-member group and if Jun Hyuk were to join, it would be a huge success. He does look a little older though.”

“Excuse me. He's still a minor.”

“A minor? How old is he?”

“17.”

“Really? He looks like he could be 20. Even better. For idol singers these days, 20 is a bit old.”

Entertainment agencies only liked the children to be younger because the 20 year olds were not unconditionally obedient.

“Okay, so what genre is that new group you’re making? Hip hop? Electronic?”

“Mostly hip hop, but they do a little bit of everything. If he joins, I can see them singing a ballad with him on the piano.”

These guys did not have an ear for music. They might as well be deaf. They were spewing garbage after hearing the instrumental that Jun Hyuk had just improvised of Kim Kwang Suk’s song.

The nerve of them to suggest being a pretty idol singer to a young genius who is to be lauded as the Beethoven or Mozart of the 21st century.

“But there is one problem.”

“Yes. What is it?”

“As you can see, our Jun Hyuk’s piano ability is at a high level, but he cannot sing.”

“Gosh, it would be a scam if he could sing with that face. Don’t worry about it. There is already a main vocal, so there won’t be any problem.”

“I understand. I’ll think about it and let you know.”

Yoon Kwang Hun mollified the agency employees as though they were children. He did not reject them on the spot for fear they would come back and bother him. Since then, a few more entertainment agencies came with the same praises and promises of stardom and left.

There were entertainment agencies at different levels of course. For the past few days, it seemed as though there had been a new regular but a man most likely in his thirties came looking for Yoon Kwang Hun.

“Hello. I am Choi Jang Hyuk of SN Entertainment.”

The title on his business card was that of Producer.

“I have been listening to this boy’s piano performances for the past few days. Is he by chance receiving a formal education?”

“No, he is self-taught. He is receiving lessons these days to learn the basics of piano,

though.”

“That’s impressive. I mean, that he can improvise any song regardless of its genre.”

Choi Jang Hyuk could not hide his surprise, but Yoon Kwang Hun was more surprised by the SN written on the business card.

“If you say SN, do you mean the SN that we know?”

“Ha ha. Yes. There’s only one SN.”

[TN]: SN Entertainment is one of the biggest entertainment companies in Korea.]

“Are you trying to make Jun Hyuk an idol singer?”

“No. I haven’t seen him sing... In our company, singing ability is the minimum requirement. If he hasn’t received formal training, that means he’s 100% talent... With this talent, he’s a genius.”

It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that it was the best in the country. It was a company with someone who could recognize talent at first glance. Only, they did not know the depth of that talent.

“So the thing is, we would like to train Jun Hyuk. What do you think?”

“Train him?”

“Yes. Actually, idol singers and girl bands are not the real mainstay of our company. It’s because we have a lot of distinguished composers, arrangers, and producers. We would like to train Jun Hyuk as a producer. Of course we’ll teach him composition as well.”

Who are they saying is teaching who? What expression would they have if they saw the songs Jun Hyuk had written so far? He wanted to show Jun Hyuk’s symphonies to these composers who wrote 3 minute hook songs filled with sound effects created by machines.

“Thank you for the thought, but I would like to let him live freely for now. He has plenty of time to learn as he’s only 17 years old.”

“17? Is that true? I thought he was at least 20.”

“I know. He’s grown so much over the last two years.”

SN Producer Choi Jang Hyuk seemed lost in his thoughts for a moment and did not speak. Once he opened his mouth, his words were entirely unforeseen.

“What if we do this? We’ll write a recommendation so Jun Hyuk can enroll in university for music. Of course we’ll pay his full tuition. He can come work for our company after.”

A long-term investment? The prejudices Yoon Kwang Hun had held against entertainment agencies all came crashing down. He had perceived them as people who took young children who were attractive and forced them to make money.

“Thank you for the offer. I don’t want to decide Jun Hyuk’s future just yet. I plan on letting him live freely. If our fates cross again, I’m sure something will work out.”

Most parents in Korea would be so grateful they would be speechless if SN offered to train their child, but this man was very different. Choi Jang Hyuk had thought of Yoon Kwang Hun as a simple cafe owner, but he was surprised by the unexpected reaction he was receiving.

“I see. That’s a good idea. Anyway, I’ll leave my business card with you. Please contact me if you need me. I’ll come at any time.”

What will Jun Hyun’s fate be??

Chapter 17

Bothersome entertainment agencies gradually stopped coming, and women who claimed they wrote for broadcast stations began to visit the cafe.

“Hello, sir. I’m Kim Ji Young, I’m a writer for channel MV.”

“Oh, yes.”

“May I meet this internet star pianist?”

“Why are you asking for him?”

Yoon Kwang Hun had the passing thought that she wanted to make some gossip show using Jun Hyuk’s handsome face.

“Have you by chance heard of a program called ‘Tomorrow’s Star’?” It’s very famous. Ho ho.”

“Are you talking about the audition show?”

“Yes, that’s the program. This is its fifth year, fifth season. We will be accepting contestant applications soon.”

“And?”

“The pianist... Right, what’s his name?”

“It’s Jun Hyuk.”

“Yes, we were wondering if Jun Hyuk would participate.”

“No. We aren’t really interested in auditioning.....”

“No, don’t think about it that way.”

“That’s not it. Our Jun Hyuk cannot sing.”

“Oh, is that true?”

Three of these writers did not show disappointment that Jun Hyuk could not sing. It was as if they had no interest in his singing.

So what exactly did they want?

Chapter 18

“Did you find some good kids?”

The ‘Tomorrow’s Star’ crew was scouring the internet in search of performers who could become topics of conversation this season. They interviewed people who had potential to catch interest to see if there was a story to tell. If the growth story and singing skill surpassed expectations, they extended an invitation to audition.

It was enough if there was even a minute story. The writers could blow up that story so it would be suitable to air on the program.

Season 2 of ‘Tomorrow’s Star’ had hit jackpot.

The winner of season 2, Heo Jun of Gyeonggi-do, Bucheon dreamt of being a singer while making a scanty living cleaning windows of large buildings. Short, chubby, and in no way considered attractive, he came out on top on singing ability alone and won \$200,000.

The dramatic reversal story was that he was competing against 2nd place James Park, a 2nd generation Korean American.

2nd place James Park was the son of a successful businessman in America, at the time attending a prestigious university, and very handsome.

Up to this point was the reversal story that aired on broadcast. The reality?

1st place Heo Jun had an affiliated agency before his appearance on the program. The agency was small and only had a couple singers specializing in event performances. Heo Jun’s main source of income came from the money earned for singing at local events. Of course the pay was not generous.

Washing windows had been just one of the many part time jobs he had taken when he did not have many performances lined up. The writers were the ones who had inflated it to create a reversal story.

He was a good enough singer to be in 1st place. Once they were down to the top 3

contestants however, any one of them could have been the winner without question.

1st place was ultimately an issue of contract conditions. Who laid out the conditions more favorable to the broadcasting station? This was the decisive factor in determining 1st place.

Heo Jun's company forfeited most of his profits to take this once-in-a-lifetime chance. When he debuted his first album, it blew up on the three main channels, cable music channels, and digital charts, also taking 1st place on all 3 main music programs.

Of course the broadcasting station took most of the profits that came from this. Only in principle was the \$200,000 prize money a predecessor to the revenue the singer would make from selling his debut album.

These contract terms are never revealed to the viewers.

Chapter 19

“Senior, take a look at this.”

“What is it?”

“There’s a boy who isn’t very famous, but is steadily gaining popularity. He’s called the pianist of Misari.....”

“Misari? Ha ha. He better not be an old man.”

The junior writer pushed her laptop over.

“What do you think?”

“Ha ha! What is this guy? Is he Won Bin’s little brother?”

[TN] Won Bin is an actor in Korea – famous for his good looks]

The main writer of ‘Tomorrow’s Star’ watched the 5 minute video to the very end and pat the junior writer’s head.

“Our junior hit something big. Ho ho.”

“What do you think of the piano? I don’t know much about that.”

“Why weigh on it? He’s playing classical music. With that face, he could play ‘Twinkle Twinkle Little Star’ and it would be okay.”

The writers felt as though they had caught the biggest fish of the year. Without delay, they went to the cafe.

Chapter 20

Upon hearing Yoon Kwang Hun's response that Jun Hyuk could not sing, the writers held an impromptu meeting in the corner.

"Won't he be okay until the team mission?"

"Exactly. He won't make it to the top 10, but shouldn't we have enough to air about him before them?"

"Exactly! If he just goes on broadcast, he'll be more popular than the top 10. We'll have to push his story as much as possible before the main missions and change the direction later to that of a pianist."

"Pianist?"

"These girls! You need to think a little. Once the program ends, we can make him go on variety shows and the game's over when he plays the piano. Entertainment agencies will come flooding in to pick him up. They probably won't give the winner a second look."

The broadcast writers did not pay attention to Yoon Kwang Hun and spoke amongst themselves excitedly.

"Excuse me..."

"Yes? Oh, sorry. We were chatting too much on our own, right?"

"Sorry, but most of the agencies have already come with scouting offers."

"Yes, we know. We figured it would be so. But if he gets popular on our show, the contract conditions change."

"Contract conditions?"

"Yes. To start, you wouldn't have to pay the advance fee."

“Advance fee?”

“Oh, you don’t know about this stuff. A scouting offer doesn’t mean that they’ll just debut the child.”

As soon as Yoon Kwang Hun showed interest, the main writer took the opportunity and started explaining in detail.

“These days, it takes 5 to 7 years to debut an idol group. The costs alone come out to at least \$500,000. When there are a lot of members, it’ll reach over \$1 million. So they take about \$40,000 to \$50,000 per person.

“I heard people like that who take money from the kids are scammers. That proper companies don’t demand any money.....”

All of the writers burst out in laughter at Yoon Kwang Hun’s words.

“No, all agencies are the same. The fees for vocal training and dance lessons alone are incredible. And how much are the costs for creating and marketing a debut album? Even after they debut, it’s not like they start making money right away.”

“Among girl groups awaiting their debuts, there are even girls whose parents have invested \$10,000 to \$20,000 to have them placed in their groups.”

“Only the main member of the group won’t have to pay the company. Instead, she’ll basically be under a slave contract.”

Looking at Yoon Kwang Hun sitting silently with his eyes wide open, the main writer thought that her plan had succeeded.

“So if he goes on our show and presents himself well, you won’t have to pay the advance fee and he can skip years of training.”

She emphasized that it would not cost him anything, but Yoon Kwang Hun’s expression went back to that of apathy.

“I see. Anyway, I understand. I’ll talk to Jun Hyuk and get back in contact, but don’t hold your expectations. Jun Hyuk doesn’t have intentions to become a star or an idol singer.”

The writers had to leave without interviewing Jun Hyuk.

Do you think Yoon Kwang Hun fell for the agency lady's lies?

Stay tuned...

Chapter 21

When the writers left, Jun Hyuk slowly approached Yoon Kwang Hun.

“Boss.”

“Yea. What?”

“Should... should I go out on that show?”

“What? What show?”

“The audition program. ‘Tomorrow’s Star’.”

“Why? Why would you go on that?”

“From what I heard, the prize money is \$500,000?”

Did he want the \$500,000 prize money? Jun Hyuk had not revealed any concerns regarding money so far. It seemed like he had only been thinking of music, but had he been hiding it all this time?

Yoon Kwang Hun was slightly taken aback by this unfamiliar aspect of Jun Hyuk.

“But that show picks singers. You need to sing... Do you sing well? To think about it, I’ve never heard you sing.”

“I don’t need to sing. The piano or guitar is enough, don’t you think?”

“Without singing? I’m pretty sure that won’t do. Ha ha.”

“Geez. You still don’t know me? You know how these ladies wet themselves over my piano performances.”

“This kid. Talking like that again... Didn’t I tell you to watch the way you speak? People care a lot about manners in the classical world. You can’t reach the top anyway. Didn’t you hear those women earlier? They’re only putting you on the air until they reach the

top 10. The prize money goes to the person in 1st place.”

At the words that only the 1st place winner receives prize money, Jun Hyuk stopped talking. Yoon Kwang Hun started to wonder about Jun Hyuk’s intentions. It seemed that to this day, he had only looked at Jun Hyuk through his musical talent. Only now 17 years old, it was an age to have a lot of interest in stars and celebrities, but he had forgotten because of the music.

“Jun Hyuk. What do you think? Do you want to become an idol singer?”

“I don’t care. I’m okay with anything as long as I can make music.”

“Okay. I’ll make it so that you can dedicate yourself to music in the best environment. Just wait a little.”

“Excuse me? No, it’s okay. I think that this right now is the best environment.”

Jun Hyuk wavered for a moment and started to say what had been on his heart.

“You changed the piano, drum set, electric guitar, everything to the best for me. Haven’t you spent more than \$100,000?”

“What are you talking about? No, that’s not it. What money do I have?”

“I know hangul and english now. I looked it all up. Everything. It was all really expensive.”

“So? Are you trying to go on the audition show to make back the money for the instruments?”

“There’s that and.....”

From the way his words trailed off, it was evident that he wanted to give the audition a try. He must have wanted to see how he was compared to other people’s music and talent. Yoon Kwang Hun also thought that it would not be a bad idea for Jun Hyuk to meet children with musical talents that differed from his own.

“Then watch the last season. If you still want to go on it after you watch it, go. I’m sure it’ll be fine. It’s an experience.”

There was something that Jun Hyuk did not know. An orphan abandoned by his parents as soon as he was born. A pitiful child who had lived on the streets since the age of 5 and who had suffered all types of jarring experiences. Also as attractive as an actor and possessing innate musicality.

The broadcasting station and public would not pay attention to Jun Hyuk's music, but concentrate more on his intriguing story.

It was worrisome that this might hurt him.

What will happen to Jun Hyuk now?

Chapter 22

The broadcasting station received over a million application video clips, but the number of people who actually qualified was under 1%.

Of this already small number, it was the ones who were already known on the internet or known by word of mouth that had the most spots on the list. The anonymous applicants were just checked casually to see if they had anything unique in their resumes and weren't really given too much attention. They started by choosing the applicants with unusual histories or funny videos. Because this was entertainment. More than talent, it was important to find something they could sell.

After filtering through the 1st round, thousands of applicants went to the gymnasium or auditorium in their respective areas. These locations were filled with booths set up for each applicant to show off their talents and try to make it to the next round. The broadcasting station's goal was to find qualifying participants in each area who were cool, admirable, or funny. Search for any real musical talent or ability was a farce. If it could sell, they wanted it – whether they could sing, dance, perform, or not.

On the day of the preliminary area qualifier, Jun Hyuk went to the auditorium with his acoustic guitar. When he arrived, the young writer he met last time came running out.

“Welcome Jun Hyuk. Come this way.”

It was obvious he was drooling at the marketable young boy.

In the waiting room the young writer led him to the main writer, Production Chief, Kim Ki Sik and a well-dressed middle-aged woman who looked as though she had made countless men cry in her youth. The two had been holding a meeting.

“Producer Kim, this is the piano genius we told you about. This is Jang Jun Hyuk.”

Producer Kim Ki Shik was already at a loss for words. He could not take his eyes from the long curly hair, tall height, and well proportioned body. Now this. This is he could sell. This would bring viewers!

“It's nice to meet you. I'm the producer in charge of ‘Tomorrow's Star’.”

“Yes.”

Jun Hyuk awkwardly shook Producer Kim Ki Shik’s hand lightly and let go.

“We have great expectations for you because you most definitely stand out. Anyway, we’re going to make you and the top 10 the main focus until Star Week. Of course the top 10 varies, but the candidates we predict usually make it into the top 10.”

Jun Hyuk seemed to be half-listening, but Producer Kim kept chatting.

“Since you can’t sing, becoming one of the finalists will be difficult. This program does run on singing.”

Jun Hyuk only nodded his head. A person’s voice was just another instrument, but he could not understand why they made such a differentiation. Songs with lyrics just had text that made it easier to deliver. Ultimately, it was just a relaying of emotion and this could be fully accomplished with a melody from an instrument.

“And since you don’t speak very much, what do you think of going with a chic concept?”

“Chic?”

“Meaning when you’re going through screening and when you’re with the other contestants, you act indifferent and a little annoyed. Maybe even a little snobby?”

The writer next to him pitched in,

“With your image, you have to act a little snobby to look more attractive. We should go with a rebellious image and not that of the kind protagonist in a romantic cartoon.”

Jun Hyuk had no idea what these people were talking about. It wasn’t like they were filming a soap opera, but what was all of this with concept and protagonist?

“Jun Hyuk is naturally chic. You won’t have to worry about it. Jun Hyuk, just be yourself.”

The young writer sensed Jun Hyuk’s discomfort and spoke up again.

“But why the guitar? Aren’t you playing the piano today?”

Producer Kim had already placed a grand piano in the screening room, but there was a guitar case hanging from Jun Hyuk's back.

"No, I'm going to play the guitar today."

Producer Kim could not hide his inconvenience. He had already imagined him playing the piano, and a guitar did not have as much impact.

He did look forward to the expectation that Jun Hyuk would sing since he brought out an acoustic guitar.

"What's the song you prepared for today?"

"I haven't thought about it yet....."

"What? Didn't you bring the guitar to sing a song?"

"No."

Producer Kim thought that it was an error in judgment to hang their expectations on a kid like this who did whatever he wanted. He even had the thought that with one mistake, they might have to edit out all of Jun Hyuk's air time.

All that was remaining was to see how they could sell his looks.

After sending Jun Hyuk from the room, the middle-aged woman who had been silent turned towards Producer Kim.

"Producer Kim. Now that I look at you, you have an eye for seeing talent. How did you find him?"

"Our youngest writer found him. What do you think? You think he'll be any good?"

"Any good? You've hit jackpot. Great, our XOR will sponsor on the condition that he makes it into Star Week no matter what."

The Marketing Director of Korea's representative casual brand XOR was already thinking of how to use Jun Hyuk as the model for their new line.

"Oh, Director. How can I decide that? There are other kids who can be used so..."

“Are you crazy? We just found a kid who could stand on the runway now and you want me to use something recycled?”

In contrast with the smiling Producer Kim Ki Sik, she held a straight face and waved her hand as if he said something ludicrous.

“Let’s do it like this, Producer Kim.”

“Yes, Director.”

“If you don’t think that child can make it to Star Week, pass him over to us now.”

“Excuse me?”

“It wouldn’t be a bad idea to make him our exclusive model altogether. He’ll need to have talent as a model of course.”

“So you want to have priority over him?”

“Exactly.”

“Then the sponsorship?”

“If that boy signs a contract with us, we’ll go through with the sponsorship. How does that sound?”

Jun Hyuk’s opinions were unimportant. No teenager in Korea would turn down this opportunity to be made into a model or celebrity.

“As is expected of you, Director. I’ll arrange for a meeting with the legal team.”

Producer Kim Ki Sik gave her a thumbs up.

But Jun Hyuk was not other kids. How would he react to this new idea?

Chapter 23

The waiting room was full of tension and anxiety pumping from the hundreds of applicants. As Jang Jun Hyuk walked in, all eyes turned to him. The female candidates' wonder and male candidates' jealousy could all be felt at once.

The attention paid to Jun Hyuk only lasted a moment, and everyone went back to practicing for the audition.

Jun Hyuk plopped down on an empty chair and started tuning his acoustic guitar. Once he was finished tuning the guitar, he had nothing left to do. Naturally, the sounds nearby came into his ears.

"What's with that bastard?"

"You can't tell by looking at him? Some entertainment agency sent him. He must be a member of some idol group preparing to debut. They just sent out the best looking kid to gain attention."

Jun Hyuk heard the two teenagers complaining because of the song they had just been singing.

It seemed like a self-written song. Jun Hyuk heard the rap for the first time and because the beat was alive, his ears had tuned to it.

Jun Hyuk put a finger on his guitar, and started playing the rap he just heard very quietly. No one paid him any attention because it was a simple rhythm, but the two boys reacted differently.

They were astonished that this annoying kid was playing their original song on his guitar.

The simple melody and rhythm went on for about 2 minutes and when they could no longer hear it, the two boys' expressions changed from surprise to embarrassment. It had clearly sounded like their song, but the second half of the song was completely different.

“By chance, is the song you just played on the guitar our song?”

The two approached Jun Hyuk to check and he nodded nonchalantly.

“It seemed a little different... was it not?”

“Isn’t this better? I changed it a little because it sounded a bit flat.”

“No, no. You’re right. It sounded way better.....”

Jun Hyuk chuckled at the two boys stuttering in surprise.

“Can we ask you to play that again?”

The two rappers asked cautiously and Jun Hyuk held his guitar again.

“The beat is too fast. I lowered the BPM to 130, so try to match that.”

Jun Hyuk played the guitar with a percussion rhythm and the two rappers matched it, murmuring.

Jun Hyuk stopped playing all of a sudden and spoke,

“There isn’t much time, so just do it as if this were the real evaluation.”

As the music started again, the two boys rapped freely. After repeating it two, then three times, they fully memorized the beat and could not stop smiling at Jun Hyuk, forgetting that they had been complaining about him.

“Excuse me... Would we be able to...”

After the two rappers learned the beat Jun Hyuk altered for them, they had trouble speaking and hesitated. Jun Hyuk saw this and smiled as he spoke.

“It’s okay. If you like this, you can use it.”

They bowed to Jun Hyuk and hurried off.

The person who was most surprised was not the rapper, but the VJ in charge of Jun Hyuk. The general producer had given him a special order to stick to Jun Hyuk.

He took his camera and ran to Producer Kim Ki Sik.

“Excuse me, Producer. Will you take a look at this?”

Producer Kim saw the tape and moaned with delight.

“Wow! This kid is a total catch.”

“Right? This is.....”

“And he’s no joke on the guitar. That rhythm... You’re saying he heard those rappers practicing for a moment and made this, right?”

“Yes. I couldn’t even really hear those rappers practicing.”

The regret he felt when he saw the guitar instead of the piano had already disappeared. He only just remembered Jun Hyuk’s improvisation skill on the piano as it had been shrouded by his handsome face. This boy might be beyond his imagination.

“If you see something good like this while you’re filming, come show me right away as you did now. We need to get interviews.”

Producer Kim Ki Sik ran to the judges’ waiting room with the videos of Jun Hyuk playing the piano at the cafe and the clip he just saw. Lee Sung Chul (who was recognized as the best vocalist in Korea, a former girl group member (who had been a popularity zenith about 10 years ago), and a successful composer (who would not be recognized by the average person) were chatting in the waiting room.

Immediately after they watched the tape that Producer Kim showed them, the composer snapped his fingers and said,

“He learned classical music.”

“Classical?”

“Yes, you can tell by his hands. All 10 fingers are stuck to the keyboard. This is difficult without training. He has for sure received lessons to fix his bad habits.”

Producer Kim handed over a couple sheets of paper.

“This is this kid’s story. He’s only 17 years old and it’s as though he’s filmed a full-blown soap opera.”

Lee Sung Chul looked over Jun Hyuk’s whole story and spoke,

“But why this song?”

“Unfortunately, he can’t sing.”

Lee Sung Chul threw the paper he was holding.

“Then it’s the end. What is he going to do without singing?”

“That’s why we were just thinking of taking him to Star Week. And from the guitar he brought with him, it seems like he might be thinking of singing an easy song.....”

“So? You’re asking us to give him leeway?”

“Yes. Ha ha.”

Unlike the disdainful Lee Sung Chul, the composer showed interest.

“It’s a remarkable talent if he could improvise this rap after hearing it from afar... Why did this kid come out on this program? If he just studies for a few more years, he could become one of the best composers or arrangers.”

“It would be a waste to hide this face in a studio. He would be able to debut as an idol singer right away with just a little preparation. Add the piano to that, and he’s all set to go out on professional broadcasts. Don’t you think that’s what he’s going after?”

With the female singer’s driving words, they settled the preliminaries.

Chapter 24

When it was his turn, Jun Hyuk went into the temporary studio that had been turned into the panel room. The only face he knew amongst the judges was that of Lee Sung Chul.

“Hi Jang Jun Hyuk. It says here that you’re 17 years old.”

“Hm... It says that you’re an orphan in your introduction... and that you’ve never attended school?”

“Yes.”

The female singer took over Lee Sung Chul’s questioning,

“Does that mean you’re living in an institution now?”

“No. I work and live at a cafe.”

“Cafe?”

“Yes. There’s a cafe in Misari.”

The female singer already looked ready to spill tears with a pitiful expression and only needed to hear a bit more of this sad story to do so.

“It says here that you wandered the streets after you got lost at age 5.....”

Jun Hyuk stared blankly at the female singer. She continued to speak because she thought that they had not understood each other.

“Tell us how you lived while on the streets...”

“Excuse me.”

“Yes.”

The camera had already closed in on Jun Hyuk's face and the mic had been lowered to catch his wretched and sad childhood story.

"Isn't this a place where we're judged by our music? Why are you asking me about my past?"

Everyone in the room froze. The three judges and the production crew could only blink while the audition contestants sat with their jaws dropped.

All of their expressions were saying the same thing.

How could he be so daring in front of the judges?

Only the producer in charge of the program balled up his fists.

'That's right. This is it. This is what we need. Something new. Fresh. Spunky!'

There had been no need to request a chic personality from him. He was naturally chic, though he was not sure if it was due to his looks, music, or rough childhood.

Unlike the other children who suffered under the pressure, he had made everyone nervous within 5 minutes.

The female singer was speechless at Jun Hyuk's bold retort and so veteran Lee Sung Chul took the mic.

"That's right, music is everything. I am expecting your talent to be as great as you are bold."

Brother, drag it out a big longer.

The producer's desperate request came through the earphones, but Lee Sung Chul ignored it entirely. He had seen countless children who mistakenly believed that they had a great talent. He thought that things like this kids' attractive looks, advanced piano skill, and mediocre arranging skills had made him arrogant.

It was necessary to judge these types of kids ruthlessly so that they would look back at themselves and try harder. Though of course there were many kids who could not even do that.

Lee Sung Chul readied himself to give criticism and invective.

“Judging by the guitar you brought, it seems like you’ll be singing a folk song... Okay, what song did you prepare?”

“Jung Tae Chun’s ‘Poet’s Town.’”

Upon hearing the name Jung Tae Joon, the 3 judges and the young contestants watching the waiting room monitor began to murmur.

“Jung Tae Chun?”

“Who’s Jung Tae Chun?”

“I don’t know.”

Even in the studio, there were not very many people who remembered Jung Tae Chun. Lee Sung Chul and the composer were the only people to remember Jung Tae Joon’s lyricism that had stirred up the 70s.

Producer Kim pushed the staff urgently,

“Look it up quickly. What year is this song from?”

“It was released in 1978.”

As soon as the staff searched the song’s history on the internet, the producer quickly spoke into the mic,

“Brother, it’s from 1978.”

Lee Sung Chul who had heard the information via the earphone needed to provide lip service to the viewers.

“Was it 1978 for Jung Tae Chun’s ‘Poet’s Town’? I think it was released around then... A teenager singing a song that’s almost 40 years old? Wow.”

The composer continued with Lee Sung Chul’s light banter,

“Will you be able to capture the emotion of a song that was created more than 20 years

before you were born and is 10 years before your generation? We look forward to it.”

Jun Hyuk started playing the guitar after placing it on his lap and breathing in gently.

Everyone’s expressions were full of expectation as the soft guitar prelude came out. Could this teenager remake this song that only their parents’ generation could know? How would he express Jung Tae Chun’s heavy tone of longing? This kid’s voice did not have the suited huskiness to it yet.

However, everyone’s expectations collapsed.

As the 10-second prelude ended, the suspense-filled judges became bemused. Instead of singing the lyrics ‘Open the window hm – and look out,’ his 10 fingers started dancing smoothly on the guitar strings.

For the 4 minutes following, there was no voice to be heard and only the melody of the acoustic guitar. When the last of the steady fingering came to an end, the only sound in the studio was the rustling of Jun Hyuk placing his guitar back in its case.

While the three judges sat blankly unable to speak, the producer could be heard shouting urgently through the earphones,

“What are you all doing? You have to talk!”

The first person to speak was the female singer.

“Isn’t there someone on the internet who plays the guitar similarly? Jung Sung Hwa? It sounded to be at that level.”

“We’re very different.”

“Excuse me?”

“I said that we’re very different.”

The singer could not speak, baffled by Jun Hyuk’s snappy replies, and the composer took the mic,

“It is the finger style, but you put in a lot of sliding.”

“Yes.”

“I also get a much rougher sense... I think it would have been better to play this on an electric guitar.”

Jun Hyuk formed a small smile as though he appreciated that there was a person who could hear properly.

“First off, the guitar technique is top level. Most teenagers concentrate on playing the faster components, but Jun Hyuk focused on saving the sentiment of the music. We could say that you were gifted as a guitarist. It was a good performance.”

Lee Sung Chul was the last to speak after the composer’s commentary ended.

“Performing an instrumental is taking a great risk. You are starting with a limitation by forfeiting the delivery provided by lyrics and relying solely on the sound of the instrument. Why did you choose to do an instrumental when it’s such a disadvantage?”

“Because I handle the guitar much better than my voice.”

“You’re saying you play the guitar better than you sing?”

“Basically.”

The producer discovered the smile that had momentarily appeared on the monitor.

“That kid. He’s being cocky. To the judges and the evaluation.”

He pressed the switch on the mic and yelled,

“Brother, push him more. We need to get a full idea of how cheeky he can be.”

“It isn’t that you can’t sing?”

“A classic guitarist can perform for an hour merely with a guitar, but there is no vocalist who can sing for an hour without accompanying music. There needs to be a piano playing at the bare minimum because the human voice is an imperfect instrument.”

Lee Sung Chul, who had proudly been lauded as the best vocalist throughout his entire life, was left speechless.

“John Lennon’s music can be considered masterpieces, but John Lennon doesn’t sing so well that he gives people goosebumps, does he?”

He had never heard of such insolence. How could a teenager like this pass judgment on John Lennon?

Lee Sung Chul however showed a completely different reaction to Jun Hyuk’s assessment of John Lennon because they were the exact words that he had said on air.

“That’s right. Anyone who wants to make music needs to have his own set of standards. I would like to hear another guitar performance from you, except on the premise that you play in a wholly different style. What do you think? If you pass this round, can you show us a completely different performance?”

“I can play the ‘Poet’s Town I just played in a different style right now. Do you want to hear it?”

“Producer Lee, let’s stop for a second.”

Lee Sung Chul asked to stop recording at Jun Hyuk’s provocative actions. The monitor that the contestants were watching as well as the mic were turned off.

“Wow. That bastard is trouble, isn’t he?”

“Yeah. Arrogance to that extent is an illness.”

Producer Kim Ki Sik who had been watching the stunned contestants outside came running in.

“Alright. Let’s hear it. Let’s see how good you are. Go ahead and play it.”

At Lee Sung Chul’s order, Jun Hyuk pulled out his guitar and started playing again.

Lee Sung Chul and the other judges, the producer and staff did not realize that 30 minutes had passed until after they had heard eight different versions of ‘Poet’s Town’.

The composer was the most astonished. He did not have the confidence to create eight completely different versions of a song even if he were given a month’s time.

This child however, accomplished this difficult task impromptu. Moreover, without

modifying once. Even if he had anticipated this situation and come prepared, each song was impressive.

Lee Sung Chul wanted to work with Jun Hyuk as an arranger for his next album, the composer wanted to see his ability to create music, and Producer Kim had the feeling that he had caught the biggest fish of the season.

Jun Hyuk found them inadequate as they were showing such excitement and surprise over such a simple and easy feat.

What is going on?!

Chapter 25

“Shouldn’t we get the contract in advance?”

“We need to. I’m thinking of selling the song he played today, too.”

When the southern Gyeonggi Province preliminaries ended, the production crew had the intuition that Jun Hyuk’s music would make history. They first needed to make sure they were on contract if they wanted to get the money from the sales.

“More importantly, you know today’s judge Cho Eun Young, right?”

“Yeah.”

“She wanted to release a remake single.”

“Ha ha. Why suddenly a song?”

“It seemed she had tact and intuition. She just wants to get noticed along with Jun Hyuk.”

“Will Jung Tae Chun permit a remake of his song? It’s been a while since he’s lived in seclusion. He won’t be up for a former girl group member turned fashionista or whatever she is singing his song. Don’t you think so?”

“Cho Eun Young knows that too. She’s asking us to make it happen in exchange for all of the profits made from the song.”

“Keke. She’s thinking she can get a permanent spot on some variety show if she can just make this song popular. Demand at events will increase too.”

“That’s right. She’s really clever in that area.”

“Since it’s something we’ll have to do anyway, let’s rush it a bit. Let’s arrange a meeting with the legal team first... Tell them to make sure they get Jun Hyuk to sign the contract.”

Chapter 26

As soon as Jun Hyuk entered the cafe the day after he participated in the preliminaries, there were two men waiting for him.

“Hello. We are from MV channel’s legal team.”

“Legal team?”

“Yes. We came to go over your contract.”

They passed a packet over the table. Yoon Kwang Hun did not pick up the contract and waited for them to speak.

“There isn’t much to it. There will be some issues with the digital tracks once ‘Tomorrow’s Star’ starts, dealing with copyrights and arrangement fees. Lastly, it explains how the digital sales will be handled. Since you’re Jun Hyuk’s guardian, all you have to do is sign it.”

“Okay. I’ll look over it and get back in contact.”

Yoon Kwang Hun spoke without touching the contract on the table.

“Excuse me?”

“I can’t just sign a contract, can I? I said I’ll look over it and let you know.”

“Sir, there really isn’t much to it. And it’s hard to continue with the broadcast without this contract.”

“That means Jun Hyuk can’t participate, right?”

“Yes because copyright issues are always very sensitive.”

“Exactly. It isn’t possible for the information to be simple if it’s such a sensitive issue, is it? I’ll look over it and call you again tomorrow.”

The contract surely contained a lot of unfair points. Kids who were desperate to become stars signed these contracts without looking at it because they would not be allowed to appear on the show without it.

The broadcast's legal team could never have anticipated that Jun Hyuk was not one of those kids who were desperate to become famous and that Yoon Kwang Hun was not an ordinary cafe owner.

"Sir, you don't have to sign right away. However, if you read it now and have any questions, we can go over them with you. Wouldn't that be better?"

Yoon Kwang Hun skipped the general information on the contract and read carefully through the section concerning revenues.

The contract contents were abominable. The best way to make sense of it was to say that their intentions were to stick a straw in Jun Hyuk.

"What is this here? Is it saying that after the broadcast ends, 20% of what Jun Hyuk makes for the next two years goes to the station?"

"Ah, yes. If Jun Hyuk becomes a star, it would be because of our station."

"Outside of music as well? This is saying that even if he shoots an advertisement, 20% of that will also be shared?"

"Yes. Wouldn't that also be attributed to our program?"

That was not the end of it. It also said that the station would hold distribution rights to Jun Hyuk's songs for three years after. Yoon Kwang Hun did not say more about this section.

They would need a distributor anyway and MV channel was top-tier.

However, he could not help but ask when an unforeseen item appeared.

"What are arrangement fees? Jun Hyuk will end up improvising existing songs to sing or play. The station will be taking all of the royalties?"

The legal team answered as if they had been waiting for this.

“Ah, let us explain that part. What goes on air is the contestant arranging the music to sing, but really, professionals are assigned to them. The experts are the ones who arrange the songs perfectly to fit the contestants. Consider it for a moment. Without being a genius, it would be impossible for them to perfectly arrange their mission songs in a matter of hours.”

“So that means pre-selected songs have already been arranged and the contestants only practice them?”

In other words, it meant that the contestants only sang what the station ordered them to.

“Ha ha. Well the song selection isn’t something that our legal team deals with, but it is true that specialists are used in arranging the songs.”

The man on the legal team spoke quickly as he saw Yoon Kwang Hun’s disapproving countenance,

“Excuse me, sir. All contestants of ‘Tomorrow’s Star’ signed this contract over the last five years without exception. Jun Hyuk passed the preliminaries, but he will be edited out completely and we’ll make it as though none of this had happened if this contract isn’t signed.”

“Okay, do that.”

“Excuse me.”

“Didn’t you say that you would make it as though none of this had happened? I’m telling you to do it.”

There is a weak party when negotiating a contract. If MV channel has approached Jun Hyuk with a contract the day after the audition, it means that they were resolved not to lose him.

Tomorrow’s events were unpredictable with Jun Hyuk. He did not want this contract to put Jun Hyuk in a situation where the station was reaping all of the profit for his skill.

Yoon Kwang Hun was also not in a place to sign the contract because he was not Jun Hyuk’s guardian by law.

Will Jun Hyuk sign? Will the MV channel get their evil way? What will happen now?!

Chapter 27

“Producer Kim, the legal team called and Jun Hyuk has refused to sign the contract.”

“What?”

“The cafe owner looked at the contract and said that it was unfair to them... They completely took it apart and sent it back but.....”

“But what?”

“It says that they’ll share the profits of only the music that goes out on our program and nothing else.”

“Geez. They’re saying they have the upper hand, are they? He’s trying to make as much off of the kid as he can. Shit.”

Producer Kim Ki Sik did not want to lose Jun Hyuk. He knew that it was hard to find a musician of this level, not a singer.

He wanted to examine his intuition again.

“Producer Kim, today’s not the day. It feels like we’re holding auditions for the national talent show. How come there’s no one useful?”

The program’s main music producer was grumbling about the contestants’ low potential as if it were the producer’s fault.

“Brother, there’s not one good person?”

“Why are you asking when you know? That handsome kid. The guitar performance.”

“You’re talking about Jun Hyuk?”

“Shit, I cried. How could that kind of emotion come out of a guitar?”

“Then you know those rappers from yesterday? The duet group from Pyeongtaek.

What do you think of them?”

“Oh yeah, those kids were good. The guitar and those two stood out the most.”

“Jun Hyuk heard that rap once and arranged the music for them. He changed the chorus a little bit too.”

“Really? After hearing it once?”

“I’m telling you that’s what happened. And that’s after he just happened to hear them practicing next to him in the waiting room. Can you do that too?”

“After hearing it once and on the spot? And hearing it for the first time on top of that? That kid really is a genius.”

Producer Kim Ki Sik made up his mind to sign Jun Hyuk even if he had to modify the contract. If a music producer with 30 years of experience in the industry said that he was a genius, there was no doubt that he was a genius.

Even if they adjusted the profit share so that they were only receiving a small amount, geniuses always made up for it. It was possible that Jun Hyuk alone could bring in more money than all of the other contestants would combined.

Chapter 28

“Jun Hyuk.”

“Yes, sir.”

“MV channel’s legal team just came and they left the contract.”

“The contract?”

“Yeah. The music rights or advertisements that will arise... Anyway, you have to sign a contract like this to be able to continue going out on the program.”

“Okay. You know those types of things well. You always brag that you were good in school... Didn’t you say that you graduated from the best university in Korea and went to a really famous college in America too?”

Jun Hyuk gave him a look full of suspicion.

“I knew it.....”

“What do you mean you knew it?”

“I’m just saying I knew it. He he. Does it make sense that someone who was doing so well is now selling coffee in a cafe?”

“Hey! This kid. You want to see my diploma? There were a lot of waves in my life.”

“Oh sure. Then you can handle the contract or whatever it is.”

“But that’s a separate problem. It’s a legal issue.”

“Legal?”

“Yeah. You and I are technically strangers. You need a guardian since you’re still a minor.....”

“Oh. Weren’t you my guardian?”

“We need to have that recognized by the country. That would be a legal guardian.”

“Then we can just do that.”

Jun Hyuk carefully looked at Yoon Kwang Hun.

“Jun Hyuk, there are two ways for me to become your legal guardian. One is to adopt you and become your father and the other is to just be your legal representative and custodian.”

“But sir...”

“Listen to everything I have to say.”

Yoon Kwang Hun stopped Jun Hyuk with his hand as if he knew what he was going to say.

“Okay.”

“A legal custodian’s rights as a guardian disappear automatically once you become an adult. After that, you would decide everything on your own. I am satisfied with being your legal custodian.”

“.....”

He had thought for sure that Yoon Kwang Hun had thought of him as someone like his child, but now he was saying legal custodian. Jun Hyuk’s face was full of disappointment.

“Truthfully, I think of you as my son but a father... it’s a parent’s duty to provide care from birth until adulthood. I didn’t do this. If I were to act selfish, I would adopt you as my son, but I don’t qualify.”

“Sir. You’re the one adult who gave me a meal without expecting something in return.”

Jun Hyuk’s eyes flushed with tears as he felt Yoon Kwang Hun’s sincerity.

“Hey, this is getting depressing. Let’s stop talking about it. Just know that I’ll become your legal custodian. I was going to do that this year anyway. You need to make an ID card since you’re 17 years old.”

Chapter 29

MV channel's legal team had been tuning the terms with Yoon Kwang Hun and appeared with the final contract.

"Thank you for agreeing to a lot of concessions."

"No need. I'm thankful as I wonder if I was being too picky."

They exchanged courtesies with meaningless words.

"Then we'll go over the highlighted details one more time."

The legal team pointed out a few articles.

"First off, the domestic distribution rights to Jun Hyuk's songs over the next three years will be reserved for MV channel, right?"

"Yes."

"But did you specifically articulate domestic distribution rights because you plan for international activity as well?"

"You never know what will happen."

Yoon Kwang Hun planned to send Jun Hyuk to a foreign country during the second half of next year at the latest. Jun Hyuk's piano teacher Go Sae Won was looking into a school in Spain and Yoon Kwang Hun was comparing schools in America with the help of acquaintances he had from his study abroad days.

Jun Hyuk would not stop creating music even if he were abroad and a masterpiece could emerge. It was to prevent MV channel from controlling the distribution over that aspect as well.

MV channel sacrificed most of the other items.

They had come to the conclusion that among the digital sales revenues, Jun Hyuk's

shares would solely be his. This unconventional contract was possible because of Producer Kim Ki Sik's demand.

He had insisted that in the five years since he had been in charge of the program, it was hard to find another person like Jun Hyuk. And it was true. So very true.

"This is a new item that we added in and we would like for you to be understanding."

"What is it?"

"It's nothing really, it concerns sponsorship."

"Sponsorship?"

"Yes. While we're filming the show, Jun Hyuk is to only wear clothing provided by sponsors. Of course this item is automatically invalid if he signs on somewhere as a formal advertising model."

"I'm guessing there's a company willing to provide sponsorship?"

"Yes, it's called XOR. It's a casual brand."

The legal team scoped Yoon Kwang Hun out. They had to get this item at the least to save face.

"That's fine. It's not anything difficult."

"Thank you."

"Do they take the clothes back?"

"Excuse me? Oh, ha ha. No, they will be giving everything to Jun Hyuk."

The legal team laughed, thinking it a relief that the contract was signed.

It was very rare for them to be so accommodating. But they knew they had to have him. And that was that.

Chapter 30

Even when the area preliminaries ended, the production crew had no time to breathe and needed to move quickly. They had to check the dormitory that hundreds of Star Week finalists would be using for about a week and they had to make sure the judges' schedules had not changed. On top of that, they had to go for days without sleep to secure copyrights to all of the songs that the finalists would sing.

"The list is all set, right?"

"Yes. We picked the 110 main contestants."

"Who are the people who will go into the top 10?"

"There are about 17 candidates."

"Including Jun Hyuk?"

"No, excluding Jun Hyuk."

"Hey, but can Jun Hyuk really not sing? When you look at people with musicality, don't they have the rudimentary at the least? He has a good voice."

Producer Kim Ki Sik looked at the young writer as if checking, no as if complaining.

"I checked numerous times, but he won't sing. I asked him to sing just one verse but he won't budge."

It was not the young writer's fault that Jun Hyuk would not sing, but she shook her head back and forth as if she were trying to avoid responsibility.

"It would be the best if he would just sing a little. It'd be over if he kept playing the piano until the finals and burst out singing during the live performance."

It was the picture that all production staff members in the conference room dreamt of. What if he kept acting like he would sing, then not back and forth, building up the suspense until the 1st live performance where he belts out all the high notes in a song

like 'She's Gone'?

How high the real-time viewer ratings would soar... It was a sweet imagination.

Chapter 31

As the bus Jun Hyuk was riding entered Sangam-dong, his cellphone rang.

“Hello?”

– This is Jang Jun Hyuk, right?

“Yes.”

– I’m a writer from MV channel. Where are you?

The familiar voice on the phone was that of the youngest writer.

“I’m almost at Sangam-dong.”

– Bus? Subway?

“Bus.”

– Then get off at the Sangam-dong Digital Media City stop and wait there. I’m going to pick you up.

“Okay.”

Jun Hyuk got off at the stop and looked around. He had wandered the downtown area lined with skyscrapers before, but this was the first time he had come here with somewhere to go. It was also the first time he had done something after making plans with another person. He had not known that this exciting and stirring feeling would be so great.

“Jang Jun Hyuk.”

As he turned his head to see who had called his name, he saw the young writer waving to him from a car.

“It’s been awhile, hasn’t it? This is it for your bags?”

She spoke as she looked around the backpack Jun Hyuk was wearing.

“Excuse me? What bags?”

“You’ll be here for a week. You didn’t bring your clothes?”

“I brought my socks and underwear.”

“Hu hu. Good. You’ll have to change your clothes anyway.”

The young writer discussed things Jun Hyuk did not know about and drove the car into MV channel’s building parking lot. She took Jun Hyuk to a personal waiting room fit for a famous singer instead of the participants’ waiting room.

There were already a few people waiting in the room and a rack full of clothing.

“Wow, he might as well be a model. A treasure like this walked in on his own? MV got really lucky. How tall is he?”

“He’s 186 cm.”

“186cm and his looks would make Jang Dong Gun and Won Bin cower. He’ll look amazing on camera. Our Director really has an eye for these kinds of things.”

“What do you think? Do you think you’ll have clothes he’ll look good in?”

“Since the mannequin kills, whatever we hang on him will be fashionable.”

Excluding Jun Hyuk who stood there blankly, everyone fussed and carefully examined him. It was only then that the young writer started to explain the current situation to Jun Hyuk.

“Jun Hyuk. These people are here because of the clothing sponsorship. It’s an extremely rare situation, but you’re a special case. Cooperate with us on this.”

The young writer addressed the people there for the clothing sponsorship again,

“The concept is chic, rebel. Please dress him accordingly since his target will most likely be teenagers.”

Jun Hyuk finally understood what was going on. It was the apparel sponsorship that Yoon Kwang Hun had told him about. It meant that they were going to give him clothes.

He had to wear a t-shirt with a big XOR logo on it with tight jeans. There was even a long and thin chain hanging from the pants.

Jun Hyuk looked at himself in the mirror and smiled slightly. The young writer thought that he was smiling because he liked what he saw in his reflection and laughed as she spoke,

“What do you think? You like it? Is it okay?”

“Yes, I like the chain. My boss really doesn’t like these types of things.”

“Older people usually don’t. Also pick out the clothes you like from this hanger. They’ll be the clothing you wear for the next week.”

“Really? I can pick what I want?”

“Of course. It’s a sponsorship. When the shooting ends, it’s all yours.”

Jun Hyuk had the thought that he had done well to participate in the auditions for the first time.

Chapter 32

The 110 survivors from the area eliminations boarded a bus to a condo in Pocheon, Gyeonggi-do. The contest to select the top 10 would begin while staying at the condo for the next 5 nights and 6 days.

A staff member from the production crew raised the tension so the ride to Pocheon would not be boring,

“There there, everyone listen up. When we arrive at the condo in a bit, the room assignments will start. As soon as the assignments are over, the team mission will start... and five people will make up each team. A band member will be regarded as one member. Place the name tag being passed out now on your chest. If you look at the tags, it says each of your... should I say genres, specialties? Anyway it has a characteristic, so check those and form your teams. And when we start filming, don't act too restless... Got it?”

As soon as they arrived at the condo, they had to meet in the basement hall without time to even greet their roommates. A set had already been prepared to shoot.

“There there, we're going to start quickly. Please make your teams within two hours.”

Not everything on the program was filmed according to a script. There are unpredictable situations and the crises these situations create. It seems these are the devices that keep the viewers under suspense. Star Week is the content that participants create, excluding their music.



Everyone was busy trying to find the teams they would be working with. A team member was a colleague but also an opponent. One could not be on a team with someone at a lower level who would ruin the mission or with someone who would overshadow others with their talent.

Jun Hyuk slowly started getting annoyed. He even had the thought that he should have listened to Yoon Kwang Hun and began to regret going on the program.

‘Shit, should I just go?’

He was going back and forth like this when two people cautiously approached him.

“Excuse me. Hello. Do you remember us?”

“Who? Oh, the rappers from last time?”

“Yes. Thanks to you, we also passed the area preliminaries. We wanted to thank you then but you left first.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Do you want to be on a team with us? If you’re okay with that.”

“Sure.”

“We’ll try gathering the team members as well.”

“I’m okay with anything, so you can take care of it.”

The two rappers spoke deliberately, but Jun Hyuk consented to go along apathetically. This was because it was easier for him to be on a team when people approached him instead of having to find people to form a team with.

The two rappers ran around looking for people to make up the rest of their team. Once Jun Hyuk agreed to work with them, the rest of the team was formed quickly.

Jun Hyuk was the perfect team member because he was good looking, his guitar skills were amazing... and the best thing about him was that he did not sing. No one knew what their mission song would be, but it was clear that they would need instrumentals to back up the singing. It also would not hurt to take him out of the competition early.

When the recording started, the VJs were busy trying to shoot the bustling participants forming teams.

Jun Hyuk sat still through the tedious period and the VJ who filmed Jun Hyuk during the area eliminations was acting as his personal mark man.

The full-fledged mission started after two hours.

22 panels were hanging on the wall and a question mark was printed on each.

“On the backside of these panels are the faces of 22 senior singers. Each team will choose a panel and check the singer you get. We will commence the contest with the song of your choosing from that singer.”

Jun Hyuk’s team chose singer Park Ki Young. Though it sounds like a man’s name, the picture was of a woman. None of the members knew who Park Ki Young was.

The broadcast staff came in as soon as the 22 teams chose their mission songs.

“This is the team that chose Park Ki Young’s song, right?”

“Yes.”

“Raise your hand if you know Park Ki Young’s songs.”

When no one rose their hands, the staff member pulled out an MP3 player.

“We recorded the songs on this, so listen to it. Both the original and edited songs are in there, so you’ll have to listen carefully.”

The staff member pulled out a music score as well.

“This is the edited score, so raise your hand if you know how to read sheet music.”

Jun Hyuk and a girl rose their hands.

“Okay. You two look at this and teach the kids. Don’t waste any time and hurry up and start practicing. When you’re done, call us.”

Someone spoke to the staff member as he was walking away.

“Excuse me, isn’t the mission song supposed to be one of Park Ki Young’s that we choose and arrange?”

“When you don’t even know who Park Ki Young is?”

“Yes.”

As the replying voice grew confidence, the staff member's brows went up.

"So? Do we need to prepare all songs by Park Ki Young and present them to you guys? And you guys will listen to all of those songs and choose? You have that much time? Are you guys crazy?"

Everyone looked dejected at the staff member's biting words and relented.

"Are you good at arranging music?"

"Excuse me? No, that's not it."

"Is arranging something that can be done within a few minutes? If you can't do it, just do what you're told. And is the broadcast a joke? You're trying to go on air with a song you arranged when you can't even arrange music? Save that for your school performance."

The staff member turned away and put his foot down.

"If you don't do this properly, your faces won't make it on air even for a minute. We'll edit all of your parts out, so get your head on straight."

When the grunting staff member walked away, the rapper spoke up,

"Shit. I knew this would happen. It was all a show."

The participants who had only been viewers up until now had just found out a new truth. Broadcast is a show.

Chapter 33

“There there. Let’s hurry up and hear it.”

The song that the staff had thrown at them was ‘Start,’ released by Park Ki Young in 1998. The singer and title were unfamiliar, but most of it was a famous song. It was Park Ki Young’s hit song so well-known that anyone who heard the climax would say, ‘Oh, this song’.

Jun Hyuk heard the song after he read over the music score. It was not bad for a ballad. The arrangement was not bad either. The only problem was that even though five people each with their own talents had come together, the guide was done as if one person was singing the ballad. It was not appropriate for five people.

“Let’s talk about how we’re going to separate the parts.”

Excluding Jun Hyuk, the four must have thought that they could not have the spotlight taken from them, so they argued and laid out their opinions.

“The amount of time each person gets needs to be similar since it needs to be fair and... we need to pick the parts that we all sing together.”

“I looked at last season and when people got greedy and messed up the song, no matter how well any one person sang, everyone was eliminated.”

“But we’re rap... I’m going to go crazy! This.”

Excluding Jun Hyuk, everyone’s faces were dark with a mix of greed and fear, tension and heaviness. Jun Hyuk was suspicious as to whether they had listened to the song properly or not.

Though it is said that the delicate voice is expressing a woman’s one-sided love for a man, but starting from the second half, with the intense guitar sound and short guitar solo, it was a rock ballad.

If an arrangement is not better than the original, it is bound to receive severe criticism. With a bad arrangement, unless it is covered with singing skills superior to that of the

original song, it is inevitable that they would receive appraisal that they ruined the song... but everyone was only worried about their own parts and not the music.

The oldest member of Jun Hyuk's group who looked to be in his late twenties seemed to be trying to take lead of the group and spoke,

"There there. Let's memorize the lyrics for each of our parts first. It's over the moment we start tripping up on stage because we can't remember the lyrics."

While everyone plugged the MP3 earphones in their ears, Jun Hyuk slowly left the area. He sat in a corner of the auditorium and looked around the room. It was full of more than 100 young people memorizing their songs or practicing with tension and anxiety.

Jun Hyuk held his guitar and started to flick the strings. He was not playing with a chord or picking a scale. He was making random sounds like a child touching a guitar for the first time.

The VJ chasing Jun Hyuk spoke while he was holding his camera,

"What are you doing right now?"

"Oh, this bustle is fun. I'm thinking about to expressing it."

"Can you be spending your time like this? You're not going to practice your mission song? You said earlier that you would be playing the accompaniment....."

"It's okay. I memorized all of the arranged score."

"What? Already? You already knew the mission song?"

"No. We saw the score earlier."

"You can memorize it after looking once?"

"Yes."

The VJ put down the camera and turned the switch off.

"Really? You can memorize it after seeing it once?"

“Yes. 3 minutes and 24 seconds. It’s short.”

The song was released in the year Jun Hyuk was born. It did not seem like he was lying that he did not know the song because it was as old as he was.

“How about the song that was arranged? Did you memorize all of that as well?”

“Yes. That was even easier.”

“You don’t like the arrangement?”

“No. It was garbage ruining the original song.”

How could he say it was garbage? The music director and arrangers participating in this show were veterans with at least 10 years of experience in this field. Professionals like that did not make garbage.

“Why is it garbage?”

“Music needs to be arranged relative to the instrument... no, to the standard of the singer’s tone. They made the song before they knew who would be singing it. The song that’s been arranged now needs to be ripped apart and fixed at the least.”

The VJ thought what Jun Hyuk was saying made sense.

“Then is there something different that you’re thinking of?”

“No. How can I when I don’t know the teammates who will be singing? I haven’t heard them either. I need to know each of their tones and strong points to arrange it.”

“Then why don’t you tell your teammates you should edit the song again?”

“Oh, I don’t know. It’s a bother. And why do you keep following me?”

He had stopped making a song based on the bustling of the room because of the VJ. The feeling of inconvenience turned into annoyance, so Jun Hyuk went back to his teammates.

They must not have been able to memorize the lyrics yet because they were still concentrating on listening to the music. The rapper who had found Jun Hyuk went

over to him and spoke discreetly,

“Do you by chance have any good ideas?”

“No, I don’t have any.”

“Hey... why are you being like this? Last time, you made a great song after just overhearing us rap.”

“I heard you both rap that time. That was possible because I knew the singers’ tonal quality. I don’t know it now.”

“Does that mean you’ll be able to arrange the song after you hear us sing?”

“Yes.”

“Hold on.”

The two rappers went to the other three people who were memorizing their lyrics,

“Let’s ask that person to make the guide for our song.”

“He’s the person who only played the guitar for the area preliminaries, right?”

The girl in her early twenties who had raised her hand along with Jun Hyuk to indicate that she could read music scores had a slightly hopeful expression.

“Yes, his skill is no joke. Even at the area preliminaries, he heard our rap once and fixed the entire thing. We were able to pass that round because of that as well.”

“Why are we trying to do another edit when the arrangement is already here?”

The man in his late twenties who called himself the team leader wrinkled his forehead. It seemed that he thought that his position as leader would be in danger if this young kid did the arrangement and song guide.

“So you’re saying... that kid should give out the parts and complement the song.”

“Yes. Let’s just hear him out first.”

When everyone decided to try listening to Jun Hyuk's guide, the man in his late twenties could no longer oppose.

"Excuse me, Mr. Jun Hyuk. We'll sing the mission song, so will you try arranging it?"

"Sure. Should we hear each person's singing first? Go around and sing the song. From the part 'I want to tell you'."

Jun Hyuk was telling them to sing the climax of the song.

"Oh, the two rappers don't need to sing. If you listen to the song well, the guitar solo comes in three phrases and that's 12 seconds. You two rap then. 3 phrases. The content is up to you. Since the song is about a woman's one-sided love, I was thinking that maybe it could be about the man's thoughts as the object of this one-sided love."

Jun Hyuk listened to the singing of the remaining three people: the arrogant man in his late twenties, the girl in her early twenties who could read music scores, and a boy who looked to be in his teens but sat without speaking as if he were an old man. Jun Hyuk was silent in thought before he began to speak,

"I'll play just the instrumental according to the score. You don't need to sing. But mister."

The person Jun Hyuk was calling mister was the man in his late twenties.

"Me? What?"

"Mister, you'll mess everything up if you keep trying to show off how high you can go."

"What?"

"I'm saying that we're just instruments. Do instruments show off how high they can go? We're just five instruments playing one song together. What's important is the overall harmony. It doesn't sound good if you force your high notes and try to show off."

"Are you trying to teach me right now?"

His face had already turned red. How could a kid like this be criticizing him?

“Your tone kind of sucks. No matter how high you try to go with a bad voice, it just becomes noise.”

“This bratty asshole!”

As soon as a fist came at the red face, the two rappers acted quickly and held it back.

“Stop it. What are you doing? The cameras are filming everything.”

The VJ was laughing with a bright face as though he were having fun. Discord between members was a spectacle for the viewers. A fist came towards the camera and hit the man shaking with anger.

“This asshole must have a rag in his mouth. He’s cursing when he doesn’t even know me!”

The owner of the fist was none other than Jun Hyuk.

Not just Jun Hyuk’s team members, but others nearby had to hold Jun Hyuk back as he kicked at the man on the floor. Only the VJ looked as though he had been given a prize as he held the camera. The recording might not be suitable for the broadcast, but it was a VJ’s job to catch such a dramatic moment.

Chapter 34

When the VJ showed Producer Kim Ki Sik the video of Jun Hyuk fighting, he laughed and questioned him on the situation.

“What are the kids doing now?”

“We barely got Jun Hyuk to stay after he said that he was going to quit everything and leave. And the kid who was hit is huffing about calling the police.”

“How did you get Jun Hyuk to stay? That kid doesn’t listen to anyone.”

“The young writer who marked Jun Hyuk did it. They’ve gotten pretty friendly.”

“Bring the kid who got hit here.”

The participant who had gotten hit by Jun Hyuk started his interview with Producer Kim Ki Sik while massaging his face with ice.

“Do what you want,”

He understood what Producer Kim’s frosty tone meant. He was giving him pressure. It meant that he needed to pack his bags and leave the condo if he did not keep his mouth shut.

“No, that’s not it. It’s okay. I’m not a kid or anything.....”

“Really? Then the company’s legal team is going to go to you with a piece of paper. Sign it.”

“What? What paper...?”

“What do you mean what paper? It’s a document saying you won’t make a problem out of today’s events. Got it?”

“Yes.”

“You can go. Also, I’ll change your team instead. Just know that we’ll be doing that.”

The participants of ‘Tomorrow’s Star’ were all expendable to the absolute target of raising viewer ratings. Once expendable, they needed to listen to the producer in order to stay in the program at all costs.



The expendable person who had been switched into Jun Hyuk’s team was someone whose skill was to the degree that he had heard he sang well at his neighborhood karaoke.

Producer Kim Ki Sik who was in charge of the show started his plan to get Jun Hyuk in the top 10.

Two VJs tight with tension stood in front of Producer Kim Ki Sik and were listening to his orders.

“Listen well. You just keep concentrating on Jun Hyuk and film him. And you... you’ve been here longer than he has, right?”

“Yes.”

“Okay then. Jun Hyuk doesn’t sing, right? Instead, you have to make him the conductor for the 5-person team mission. He has to be the maestro who does everything from arranging to directing parts for the members. You understand what I’m saying, right?”

“Ah, I get what you’re saying.”

“Okay. That’s Jun Hyuk’s theme for this week’s 5-person team mission. I’m putting it in your hands.”

“Don’t worry about it. The two of us will bring back lots of good shots.”

They finished preparing the materials to make Jun Hyuk a maestro. Now they needed to convince the viewers that Jun Hyuk was qualified to be in the top 10 even without singing.

The people to persuade the viewers were the judges themselves.

Before Jun Hyuk's team performed as the fourth to be on stage, Producer Kim and the main judges started their conference on the issue.

The main judges of Season 5 were slightly experimental with the addition of two new members.

Along with Lee Sung Chul and the legendary singer and songwriter Yoon Jung Su, singer of 25 years Lee Eun Jin who had been given the nickname 'Diva of the Night Sky' because she did not make appearances in public or on broadcast joined the panel.

Last was Son Jin Young from JYS, one of Korea's top 3 agencies which produced countless girl groups.

"Producer Kim, why are you like this for this season? You're openly pushing for this kid."

"Ha ha. Excuse me just once. Aren't I a person who goes back and forth between heaven and hell based on the viewer ratings?"

"So? You're saying that kid will guarantee viewer ratings?"

"Sung Chul. Who are you talking about?"

Yoon Jung Su who had not seen Jun Hyuk during the area preliminaries was asking.

"There's a kid. A kid who gives me headaches. Oh right, he's the type you would like."

Yoon Jung Su's eyes widened as he was flipping through the files containing each person's history and special characteristics.

"What is this? He got all the way here just by playing the guitar and not singing? And... what? He's an orphan?"

"Yeah. Other than not singing, he's the best. His story's good, he's better looking than Kang Dong Won, the guitar performance is great, he's probably a genius in arranging, and his song analysis is outstanding."

"Seems like he'll get all of the women's texting votes. He could even get to the top 5 on votes alone."

As they discussed Jun Hyuk, Producer Kim Ki Sik said the final defining words,

“This kid is just a star. He has the talent and looks to cover a song. On top of that, he has an unstoppable nature. You know well since you’re all stars. One of those people who is bound to become news whatever he does.”

Lee Eun Jin who had been listening silently had an opposing expression.

“So you want us to push for him openly?”

“No. I’m asking you to find something in him that will cover his inability to sing. If you can’t find anything, I won’t hang on to him.”

They could protect Lee Eun Jin’s pride as this was her first time on the judges’ panel. What went out on air was the producer’s magic, or editing. She was not such an amateur that she would make a fuss if an edit was made entirely different from her intentions.

Kim Ki Sik was confident. He was certain that the viewer ratings would go up if he made Jun Hyuk a star.

Chapter 35

“What is the song?”

“It’s Park Ki Young’s ‘Start.’”

“Please start.”

Yoon Jung Su tried to create laughter with his play on the song title, but nothing could make the nervous participants laugh. Yoon Jung Su’s expression became awkward.

The team members’ looked at Jun Hyuk who nodded lightly at them as a signal. The song started with his first guitar stroke and 4 minutes passed.

Everyone on the team had a look of reassurance on their faces that they had finished without making any mistakes and the four judges wore strange expressions. The judges had without a doubt listened to the song with awe and admiration, but their expressions had completely changed once it ended.

Lee Sung Chul was the first to grab the mic and he opened his mouth slowly,

“Um... It was good. This, well...”

Delaying the evaluation, he coughed a few times in embarrassment.

“The song is very good. Everyone sang well... The other teams split up the song but this team was unique and not one person stopped singing. They put in a chord when it wasn’t their part... ah... The only one who didn’t sing is the person on guitar, right?”

Everyone’s eyes settled on Jun Hyuk, but he just blinked back at Lee Sung Chul. Producer Kim who had been monitoring the close-up of Jun Hyuk’s face began to laugh again.

“Ha ha. That kid’s face is as though he doesn’t even care about the judges.”

Everyone in the staff room nodded their heads. This was the first time in five seasons that they had seen anyone so arrogant without any sign of tension.

“...And the rap was also really good. The feelings of the man who is the object of the one-sided love that was not in the original song. It was also very funny how you expressed that very indifferently... Who wrote that?”

“Yes, we wrote it.”

The two rappers could not hide their happiness from Lee Sung Chul’s compliment. However, they had to hide the traces of their laughter because of the following evaluation.

“Yet... It was generally good, but you all made a big mistake. Yoon Jung Su will probably be the one to tell you what that mistake was. I heard the song well.”

A mistake? The music and singing were perfect. Did Lee Sung Chul not say that himself? Everyone swallowed and gave Yoon Jung Su their attention.

Yoon Jung Su held the mic and smiled at Lee Sung Chul.

“Have you decided to avoid saying the invectives this season? Why do I have to say the bad things?”

“You have to get some of the abuse online. He he.”

Yoon Jung Su fixed his mic and his mood became serious.

“Well... you heard enough compliments, but I’ll say it again. The song was really good. At this rate, it could go on a concert stage immediately and there wouldn’t be any problem.”

The team members became excited again. They might be able to achieve a dream-like whole team pass.

“It was absolutely perfect as not one person showed where their disadvantages lied, and the chords were inserted exquisitely so that not one person stood out more than another. However...”

Everyone swallowed. It seemed like the real assessment was going to start now.

“.....However, that also means that there wasn’t anyone who was special. There wasn’t anyone that we as the judges were drawn to. To say it another way, should I say it was

like food made with ordinary ingredients? It was very tasty, but we couldn't find the ingredients and we couldn't tell what the sauce was."

Yoon Jung Su finished his assessment as the disappointed participants looked on,

"A good performance is the basic. That basic was executed perfectly, but there wasn't anything special. Can I say that everyone was just passable? It felt like that. You worked hard."

The third person to get the mic was the person who had newly joined the judges, Lee Eun Jin,

"The two of you said so many good things that I have nothing to add. Saying that you're passable means that you were short of talent. If you have a weapon, you can't hide it even if you try. It comes out while you're singing. But there wasn't anyone on stage whose weapon showed."

Lee Eun Jin's evaluation continued after a moment of sighing.

"There is someone who does need to receive an excellent evaluation, isn't there? I'm sure you all know who it is. The chef who made admirable food with ordinary ingredients. That person needs to get good ratings for sure."

The team members' eyes naturally shifted to Jun Hyuk and Lee Eun Jin smiled,

"I see you are all telling us who that chef is."

Producer Kim who was watching the evaluation with the most tension put down his worries. He was nervous because there had not been one word said about Jun Hyuk, but Lee Eun Jin who he had thought would be the most biting had moved the way he wanted her to. This was the signal that Lee Eun Jin was sending to Producer Kim Ki Sik.

She was saying that she would cooperate with Producer Kim Ki Sik and help him and not to forget it. She had done Producer Kim Ki Sik a favor and he would have to repay the debt at some time.

Thanks to Lee Eun Jin's judgment, the viewers would not be able to raise issues even if Jun Hyuk went on to the next stage. The chef who made great food with mundane ingredients. This was enough.

The last person to get the mic was Song Jin Young of JYS and she wrapped it up with an intense assessment.

“This is a program that discovers stars through competition. You are all forgetting that. A song that’s like acapella? It’s nice to listen to. This is a boxing ring, not an afterschool club.”

All of the cameras focused on the judges. As the cameras were catching the judges share their thoughts and opinions, Lee Sung Chul took the mic,

“The people who passed this round are... the two rappers and Jang Jun Hyuk.”

The two rappers could not hide their excitement and Jun Hyuk remained in the same state. The girl would had been eliminated had tears in her eyes and the boy who had joined the team late was scowling.

“The rappers showed talent in their fun rap and Jang Jun Hyuk showed great capability as a producer. However, you’ll have to keep in mind that this program is about discovering stars and not producers. You’ll have to show yourself as more than a producer and as a musician on the next stage, or it’ll be difficult to advance any further. That is all.”

Chapter 36

After that, performances that alternated between happiness and sadness continued and with the end of the first round of Star Week, the 40 people who passed were decided. In a matter of 48 hours, 70 out of 110 people had been sent home.

The 2nd round was to start now. From here, half would make it up to the last round of Star Week and the rest would be boarding the bus to Seoul Station, staying for just another day.

Known as the most cruel round, the 2nd round consisted of two people becoming a team to compete with another team performing the same song.

The judges simply chose the better group. With misfortune in choice of partner, no matter how much one shined, there was no way to stay alive. Everything moved according to a plan especially because the production crew organized the teams. There was the production crew that knew this and the naive participants who thought that it was up to luck.

The person who became Jun Hyuk's partner was Nam Seung Hee, an aspiring singer in her mid-twenties who had received the appraisal that she was the prettiest contestant in this season's Star Week.

Nam Seung Hee who dreamt of being a female rapper like Yoon Mi Rae was another one of Producer Kim Ki Sik's hidden cards.

The VJ captured Jun Hyuk's face during his first meeting with Nam Seung Hee. The plan was the flirtation between the ideal boy and girl. It was the meeting of this season's best looking guy and prettiest and sexiest girl. Nam Seung Hee fit the tall Jun Hyuk well with her long and slender legs. When he got a good shot of the two together, the VJ moved busily with excitement.

When the VJ saw Jun Hyuk's expression in the camera, he knew that Producer Kim's plan was working. Jun Hyuk was blushing and could not stop smiling as he looked bashful.

"Hello. My name is Nam Seung Hee."

The Jun Hyuk who shook the hand Nam Seung Hee held out as she laughed was not the rough teenager who threw his fist and cursed, but a young boy who could not hide his awkwardness in front of a girl.

Nam Seung Hee on the other hand did not let her guard down and kept showing a stiff face. In the individual interviews, it was possible to know why she was not unconditionally pleased at becoming Jun Hyuk's partner.

"Do you know what we call Jang Jun Hyuk amongst ourselves?"

"What?"

"It's poisoned apple. Poisoned apple. The poisoned apple that Snow White died after taking one bite."

"Why? Why is Jun Hyuk a poisoned apple?"

"Because you want it and it looks edible, but you die the second you put your mouth to it. The music that Jun Hyuk makes is so perfect that you want to sing it after you hear it... but the end result is that Jun Hyuk is the only one who stands out and the person singing falls... That's why he's the poisoned apple."

The VJ conducting the interview thought that this might be a consummate metaphor.



The duo's mission song was Finkl's 'NOW'.

"Do you want to sing the song first? According to the original."

"What? Why do you want me to sing all of a sudden...?"

"To see the difference between the tone you normally speak in and the tone you sing in."

Nam Seung Hee sang softly to Jun Hyuk's gentle guitar accompaniment. It was just a tone check and it did not matter if her pitch was unstable or if she was not on beat.

When she finished singing, Jun Hyuk looked surprised.

“Um. Have you received professional training?”

“Excuse me? Oh, yes. I have.”

“It seems like you’ve practiced a lot. Your voice became scratchy.”

Scratchy? Her voice was not husky in any way, but what could he be talking about?

“Oh, you don’t need to worry. It’s a good thing. It’s become strong. Wait, is there a piano?”

As Jun Hyuk looked around, the staff rushed to set up a digital piano.

“Here, listen to this.”

He put his fingers on the keyboard and started to play. While a slow piano sound spread, his right hand started to move faster. It was a colorful melody, but the waiting room was full of an overall slow jazz.

Since the rival teams stopped practicing as they found themselves lost in Jun Hyuk’s music, Nam Seung Hee was out of the question.

Nam Seung Hee who had been drunk with the aftertaste of the sound of the piano was swept with embarrassment once she came back to her senses.

“Are you telling me to sing this? Isn’t this a piano instrumental?”

“No it isn’t because I’ll actually only be playing the accompaniment. We’ll have to fill the rest with singing.”

“This is jazzy but what am I supposed to do? I’ve never sang jazz before.”

“You can start practicing now. Just keep one thing in mind; this is perfect for your voice.”

The VJ almost felt awkward at Jun Hyuk’s image of leading the opponent in such a straightforward manner as opposed to the 5-person mission. How could he change so much when it seemed like he was just constantly arrogant?

‘This kid was no different from an everyday teenager.’

Nam Seung Hee asked for a little time and left her seat at Jun Hyuk suddenly asking her to sing jazz.

“Jun Hyuk, can we do a short interview?”

“Again?”

“What do you mean again? You haven’t done that many. Out of all the Star Week contestants, you’ve done the least. Everyone else will do anything to get an interview.”

He convinced a complaining Jun Hyuk and started the interview.

“Why did you choose jazz all of a sudden? It seems like Nam Seung Hee barely listened to jazz music.”

“Her tone sounded like a clarinet. But.....”

“But?”

“She wants to do hip hop... hah. It was so funny I didn’t know what to do. She doesn’t fit with hip hop at all.”

“Even if her tonal quality is good, she says she can’t do jazz.”

“She can just sing it slow since I’ll fill the rest with the piano. We can save it.”

“It seems like you like Nam Seung Hee looking at the way you accommodate her. Yeah?”

Jun Hyuk did not show any shock at the VJ’s frank question,

“Yes. She’s pretty.”

“Oh, you’re honest.”

The VJ was shocked that he had responded so easily.

While Jun Hyuk was doing his short interlude interview, Nam Seung Hee was on her cellphone getting angry.

“Director, talk to the producer here. They’re telling me to sing jazz. They didn’t give us an arranged song and the kid who’s my partner.....”

“Oh, I see. Sorry. I guess I bothered Director for nothing.....”

– Nam Seung Hee, listen closely.

“Yes.”

– What do you think you are? Are you a singer? What? Jazz isn’t a genre I’m pursuing? You want to set your image in hip hop? You’re being annoying.

Nam Seung Hee could not say anything in response to the director’s harsh words and felt like her head was empty. She had been mistaken for a moment that she had passed the auditions and entered Star Week on her talent.

She realized her position as one of countless aspiring celebrities.

– Listen well. Do you know how much this company spent to get you there? Genre? Character? Do that stuff when you become a singer. Right right, your job is to shut your mouth and do as the broadcast station says. Got it? And your partner is 100 times better than you. You’re being carried along with him. Don’t call me when you’re just a little brat who doesn’t know her position!

The director who had hung up after his rant had told her what she needed to do. She needed to hang on to the boy that even the main producer was fussing over no matter what.

Chapter 37

“Don’t think about it as something difficult. All you have to do is remember the tempo and make sure not to fall behind it or go ahead of it while you sing.”

“Are you able to record the piano accompaniment for me? I really don’t have the confidence... I think I’m going to lose the beat. I can’t keep asking you to play the piano for me... I’ll practice on my own.”

“Ha ha. I’m telling you it’s okay. I’ll play it for you 100 or 1,000 times, so let’s practice together.”

Producer Kim Ki Sik smiled widely as he was monitoring Jun Hyuk openly show his affection for her and kept giving orders to the staff,

“Hey. When Star Week ends, get the kids from Jun Hyuk’s team together again. The mission song was Park Ki Young’s ‘Start’ right?”

“Yes.”

“Get that song ready for a digital release in the recording studio. It’ll go up. And the Finkl song that Jun Hyuk just played on the piano... formally record that too so it’s ready for service the day the episode airs. Got it?”

“What? The instrumental? Not the song that they’ll sing later?”

“There aren’t very many female singers in Korea who can make money singing jazz. It’ll sell if the singer is someone at Lee So Ra’s level. Jazz that girl sings? Doesn’t make sense. It won’t make digital sales. But a piano instrumental will work for background music on blogs and cafe franchises.”

The staff could tell why Producer Kim Ki Sik was a rising producer in musical variety shows.

He had an eye for screening music, but he was also a businessman who could certainly choose music that would sell and even find the places where the money would come from.

“At any rate, this stage isn’t about music. It’s eye candy for the viewers. All we have to do is make sure we show them those two flirting. Since we showed them Jun Hyuk’s music in the 1st round, we need to highlight the other kids’ music too this time. Keep your heads on straight.”

Producer Kim Ki Sik had did not care about the same-some rival mission. To avoid any risks, the rival group to go against him was made up of two people who definitely needed to pack their bags.

Producer Kim Ki Sik had a lot of his expectations riding on the last mission. In the meantime, there was the perfect participant to make Jun Hyuk’s image. It was a boisterous trash metal band.

They were like firewood to set Jun Hyuk on fire for the last time before he went into the top 10.

They were famous in Hongdae’s rock scene. They were Steel Blade.



The last 20 participants were eyeing each other wondering who their final partner would become as they gathered to choose the last 10 people to go on live broadcast for the top 10 race. There was certainly someone in this group who was already chosen to go into the top 10 early. If they were paired with that person, they were bound to lose.

However, there was one person who they could win if paired up with. That was none other than Jang Jun Hyuk.

He was better looking than an idol singer and looked more like a model or actor and all of the judges praised him for his producing skills. But he could never go to the top 10 of the ‘Tomorrow’s Star’ program. He was the only participant who could not sing even though it was an audition for singers.

Today’s mission was Jang Jun Hyuk’s last. All of the participants had the same thought and they were just waiting to become his partner.

The elaborate jazz piano he played in the 2nd round of Star Week. If he just did that much, they could bring in the best backing band and have him perform in the contest.

Jun Hyuk was called into his personal waiting room again and the people representing the clothing sponsor company were waiting for him brightly.

“These are the new products from our winter season. The last broadcast was fall, but this episode will be going out in November. We’ll be preparing for the winter season. I’m betting this’ll be sold out once it goes on air. Ho ho.”

The people from the company held a pair of black jeans and a checked shirt to Jun Hyuk’s body to find the right size.

“If you pass today’s round and make it into the top 10, we’re planning on getting a formal model contract with you.”

Jun Hyuk wrinkled his face as he touched the clothes, and turned to the young writer.

“I don’t want to wear it. I can just go out like this, right?”

“What? Why won’t you wear it? These are going to become the new main pieces of our company!”

The director of XOR yelled in surprise.

“Miss, how am I supposed to wear this when it’s so hot I could die?”

Looking at his scowling face, she smiled again and spoke. He was still young. She knew that it would be faster to talk him into it.

“Jun Hyuk. You have to bear it. This is business. Every scene that goes out on TV is money. You may not understand because you’re still young, but broadcast means money. You’ll be able to touch that money soon.”

Eventually, the young writer stepped in. She said the easiest words to convince him,

“This is the last time. It’s okay, right?”

Chapter 38

“Okay, now two teams are going to get together to form one group. Everyone listen well to see who your partner will be.”

The partners were revealed one by one and the luckiest in the 3rd round team selection was not one person, but four.

“The next is the only band that passed the 2nd round, ‘Steel Blade’ and their partner will be... Jang Jun Hyuk.”

The Steel Blade members did not show it, but they were overjoyed that they had gotten one step closer to the top 10. What luck!

“We’ll reveal the mission song. It’s Jewelry’s Super Star.”

The song released in 2005 was the first that got Jewelry 1st place. It made the other participants jealous. It was established that it was advantageous to have a fun song.

Once all of the partners and mission songs were revealed, everyone hid their claws and started to greet their partners.

“It’s nice to meet you. I’m the vocal, Han Ki Su. Oh, don’t punch me because I’m not using formal speech with you. You can use informal speech too. Ha ha.”

Jun Hyuk was uncomfortable with the band member who was acting more friendly than was necessary.

“But do you know this song?”

“The mission song? Yeah. You don’t know it?”

“No. I don’t have CDs of idol songs.”

“Then let’s hear the song first. We’ve heard it, but we don’t really remember it either.”

Everyone listened to the MP3 player. After they listened to the whole song, the

members of Steel Blade sighed in relief. It did not seem like there would be any problem changing the song into band music because the song itself was very light.

“What do you think?”

“It’s fun.”

“Right? We got lucky. It won’t be hard to change it to metal.”

“I heard you’re a producing genius. Do you have any ideas?”

The judges’ evaluation from the 5-person mission had become a hot topic between the contestants. A producing genius worthy of the highest praise. Jun Hyuk who made great music without exposing himself could make this into a heavy metal song.

The band leader who was also the vocal had high expectations, but Jun Hyuk made all of those expectations come crashing down.

“Do as you please since we’ll be dropped anyway. I’ll go along with whatever you want to do.”

“What?”

“We can’t go to the top 10 anyway.”

Jun Hyuk’s words that came from out of the blue hit his head hard, “It can’t be. Do you know something? Is it already decided? Already?”

“No. I don’t know that but you guys aren’t that good. You just fit in a band to broaden the assortment. There’s no way you don’t know you guys aren’t good, is there?”

They had not anticipated that this young kid would be saying that they would be eliminated because of a shortage of talent. Even the judges had given them compliments on the original song they presented in the area preliminaries. In round 1 and 2, they had received the evaluation that they were a band with feeling.

But he is saying that their skill is poor?

Jun Hyuk kept speaking in a sarcastic tone without paying attention to the members shaking in anger.

“You sir on the drums, say something. Don’t you know?”

The vocal, Han Ki Su spoke to Jun Hyuk when he suddenly sought agreement from the drummer,

“Is that right? We’re not that good? Let’s hear it then. You speak as the genius producer. What’s so bad?”

“If you force the high notes and barely hit them, the listeners are the ones who are uncomfortable. A vocalist is someone who can hit the high notes easily. ‘Soot’ catches on to it. Soot! A person who uses the voice instrument freely and well. That’s what we call a vocalist but you have a hard time with the high notes and your voice itself is lacking strength... It’s like you’re just imitating a rock band.”

“Hey! It just sounds like that because my voice is thin.”

“What are you talking about? Being thick and thin is an issue of tone. That has nothing to do with strength. Not all metal band vocals are Ronnie James Dio. There’s Klaus Meine too.”

Han Ki Su’s face felt heated as the weaknesses he was aware of were being bothered.

“Fine. Say that’s true for me. Then the guitar?”

“Guitars aren’t there just to play do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do. It’s about expressiveness. Ah, you asshole.”

While everyone was confused by the swearing that had come out of nowhere, Jun Hyuk was looking at the guitarist.

“Express this with the guitar. ‘Ah, you asshole.’ Or um... ‘Please excuse me this one time.’ Something like that is okay too. Scale, technique... these things aren’t important, but you don’t know that.”

Jun Hyuk went over each member one by one as though he were a judge.

“Can you play the bass all day with one beat? Without a metronome? If you can’t do that, you haven’t practiced enough. Or you can’t keep a beat.”

They had not heard such severe criticism since they started performing in Hongdae.

This assessment was the same as saying that they were beginners.

They thought that he was going to tear the drummer apart next, but he did not.

“You asked me for an idea on the arrangement, right? I already finished the edit. It’s just that you guys probably won’t like it.”

He had only heard it once. After that, he had been evaluating the band members’ skills. When is he saying he finished arranging the song?

“How did you do it?”

At the words that he finished the arrangement, their curiosity overcame their indignation.

“Drum instrumental. The drum is the main. Everyone else is slight and the vocal can be taken out completely. The best thing this band can do is to support the drum.”

The VJ marking Jun Hyuk had a vague idea of the music he was trying to pursue. This arrogant young genius only thought about music. He only focused on finding the best of any song. It was certain that he never had the intentions of becoming a star.

Jun Hyuk does not care about things like hitting high notes as the public likes or familiarity that is easy to listen to. He only thinks about the music.

Though it is an old song, it is still by a girl group. He wants to change that into a drum instrumental?

When the drummer heard the words drum instrumental, he raised his hand in surprise,

“No. What do you mean a drum instrumental? It’ll never work out. Let’s just go with the usual rock. It’s easy to change this song to a rock version.”

Jun Hyuk ruined the cold atmosphere that the drummer was trying to ease again.

“Oy. Now I know. Sir, you guys are in this state now because you keep giving in. The person with the most talent should have dragged everyone along. The vocal and guitarist don’t know that they’re not that good because you cover for their singing and guitar.”

Eventually, the band leader and vocal left the practice room and the guitarist and bassist followed him to calm him down.

Producer Kim Ki Sik checked what the VJ had filmed since they were in a state where all practice was suspended, and he could not stop laughing. Jang Jun Hyuk said and acted in ways that always made news.

The discord between Jang Jun Hyuk and the other participants would undoubtedly become the best in increasing tension on the program.

Chapter 39

“Hey, I said we don’t have time. We can’t be wasting our time being angry. Let’s at least try to do something between ourselves.”

“Then what about that asshole?”

“That asshole said himself that he would just go along with whatever we wanted to do. We can give him 2nd guitar or keyboard and he can just pound out the chords.”

The Steel Blade members were fuming. The production team had not provided them with an arranged song because they were paired with Jun Hyuk and their turn was fairly early. They needed to move quickly.

It was not hard to make a rock version of the song. They did not do much to the original song but add parts for the guitar, bass, and drum with a guitar solo in the middle in G major in a pentatonic scale. They of course did not forget to add shouting for the vocal.

The band members only looked for Jun Hyuk after they had practiced several times.

“Hey. You said that you would go along with whatever we wanted, right? Just scratch out the chord with the acoustic guitar. You don’t have any objections, right?”

Jun Hyuk shrugged to reply that he did not care and began to simply scratch out the chords on his guitar. The sound of his acoustic guitar was drowned out by the strong sound of the electric guitar, but Jun Hyuk did not seem to care.

Eventually, the VJ ran to the main producer. He felt like Jun Hyuk’s performance would be too flat.

Producer Kim Ki Sik and the program’s general music director stood by Steel Blade and listened to them practice.

“What do you think?”

“What do you mean? You don’t have ears? The main producer of a music program? How many years have you been doing this?”

Not certain if it was due to the producer or the music, but the music director looked as though he had a bad taste in his mouth. After listening to the band's music for a while, the producer spoke out of nowhere,

"Then what about that?"

"What are you talking about?"

"The drum instrumental Jun Hyuk mentioned earlier. Making the drum the main."

"That's something I really want to hear, but won't people start changing the channel after 30 seconds of hearing a drum? How many people do you think like – no, know Moby Dick by Led Zeppelin? And the people who like drum solos don't watch our program."

It was the place where the top 10 was to be selected. They could not show a whole song where the drum was the main, but it could work if they edited well and saved the zest. It was unique, an advantage, and a specialty.

"If we go out like this, that band is done."

The music director was speaking quietly, but Producer Kim raised his voice as though he wanted everyone to hear,

"Our program will be done for as well. We've raised the expectations for Jun Hyuk, but if the last stage is in that state... Even if they get eliminated, they'll need to do it so they're remembered."

Producer Kim decided to get help from the music director to resolve this problem. The music director and Producer Kim secretly called Steel Blade into the conference room.

"We heard you guys practicing and honestly, we're disappointed."

"There are 10 teams right now. Two dance, two R&B, two ballad, two island and folk, one hip hop, and you guys, metal. You guys are the weakest."

"Weak isn't even cutting it. If you guys go the way you were just practicing, we can't even put 10 seconds of that on air. We have to cut it up and piece it together for about 20 seconds and go straight to the judges. It's that bad."

“Tell us if you don’t have the confidence to do it. We’ll do the arrangement for you now if necessary.”

The band members could not lift their heads while these heads of such a grand show were criticizing them in a manner that was threatening.

“To tell you the truth, the chances of you guys entering the top 10 is below 10%. What can you do? Metal is a subculture in our country. At this rate, you guys are 100% getting eliminated.”

The music director looked at the band members and spoke,

“During the 80s, heavy metal was so popular that Japanese band Loudness did a world tour. But what about our country? Sinawi, Buhwal, Baekdusan. People said they were the three greatest guitarists, but they only performed in Korea. You guys think the viewers are going to listen to your music?”

“If you guys get eliminated, all you’ll have left are memories. Jun Hyuk on the other hand proved his genius with just two songs in the area preliminaries and Super Week. Even if he doesn’t get into the top 10, there are loads of people who are waiting to scout him as soon as this program is over.”

“He’ll probably be greater once he’s done with the broadcast. We put someone like him with you but what are you guys doing? Honestly, even if I don’t edit your performance, the judges will probably cut the song after about one minute. There’s nothing to hear. I’m sure you guys will hear all types of criticism too. Then you’re really ending on the worst note.”

Vocal Han Ki Su must have been unable to tolerate the comparisons to Jun Hyuk because he spoke after a long silence,

“Producer. That’s not right. Until now, the judges...”

Before Han Ki Su could even finish his words, they heard something that would have been good not to hear at all.

“What about the judges? When they praised you? You think that was sincere? Your music... honestly, it sucks. Sung Chul and Jung Soo started out in bands. You don’t know? The broadcast is a show. The judges are matching that.”

“In my opinion, Jun Hyuk will arrange the song better than I can. I’m saying this earnestly.”

“You guys choose. This is it for what we are thinking. Then do your best.”

The two left the room after saying that they did not have an option, not that they were giving them a choice. The members sat still for a while with dark expressions.

In the spirit of rock, they needed to quit everything and leave. However, they were just youths hungry for success.

“Bro, what do we do? Do we do what they say?”

The bassist acted as if he were asking leader Han Ki Su what they should do, but he meant that they should do as they were told to.

“Fine. Since it’s gotten to this, let’s just stand out in the performance and step all over that kid.”

Han Ki Su grit his teeth and emanated anger.

“How?”

“Didn’t he say that he would make the drum the main? Do as he says and we’ll make him second instead. A second who’s just scratching out chords will never stand out. I’m saying let’s do that.”

Han Ki Su and the guitarist who planned to drown out Jun Hyuk met eyes and nodded. The band members left the conference room and approached Jun Hyuk.

“Look here. Let’s forget all of our bad feelings and focus on the mission. I’ll be the bigger man since I’m older and apologize.”

Vocal Han Ki Su saw Jun Hyuk take the hand that he put forth and felt relief.

“You do the directing for this mission. We’ll follow you. That’s okay, right?”

“I can really do what I want?”

“Yeah. Do whatever you want.”

Jun Hyuk went to the drummer as if he had been waiting to hear that he could do as he pleased,

“By chance, can you do double bass?”

“Huh? Double?”

The drummer winced when the other members looked at him. Until now, he had never performed in double bass and there was only a single bass drum in their practice room.

The drummer glanced at his members and spoke,

“I can’t do it yet. I am practicing.”

“Hm... I guess we’ll have to do it differently.”

Jun Hyuk kept mumbling to himself and pulled a notebook out of his bag. It was printed with staff lines and looked like a notebook that a child in elementary school would use.

“Sir on the bass, do you know how to read music scores?”

The bassist nodded as he spoke,

“I’m the only one who reads scores. Everyone else learned by listening to music.”

Jun Hyuk’s hand drew out the bass line. He ripped the completed score out and passed it to the bassist saying,

“Since the drummer can’t play double bass, you’ll have to cover him. You’ll be able to do it.”

“Huh? Uh... I think it’ll work but... I’ll try it.”

Jun Hyuk had created the line so that the bassist would be able to play it. He could do it, he just had not done it before. Jun Hyuk led the drummer by his hand to the drum set,

“I’ll perform it while you record it on your cellphone. You can get the song listening to

that, right?”

“You can play the drums?”

No matter how much the VJ filmed, Jun Hyuk kept showing new sides to himself and even seemed wonderful.

“I’m not very good at it, but I can play a little. Just think of what I play as the skeleton and put some flesh on it.”

Jun Hyuk started drumming lightly to tune the set. He must have liked the sound because he smiled and held the stick properly.

“Okay, start recording. One, two, three, four.”

Jun Hyuk signaled the start with the drumsticks and played a heavy bass. While he performed on the drums for four minutes, none of the contestants in the room even made the sound of their breathing. The drummer who had been carefully watching from next to Jun Hyuk had bloodshot eyes. He would have shed tears if Jun Hyuk had played for 10 more seconds.

He had dreamt of Canadian group RUSH’s drummer Neil Peart and practiced for countless days to the point where his palms ripped just so he could play the drums like this.

The other contestants had been thinking that Jun Hyuk was a songwriter playing the acoustic guitar. No one could close their mouths when he played the drums with the pressure of a large truck like Metallica’s drummer, Lars Ulrich.

The producer ran out to the practice room as soon as he heard that Jun Hyuk was playing the drums himself. He was not able to hear the whole performance, but he felt bliss from what he heard from after the 2-minute mark. The music director who had been watching alongside the producer could not speak properly,

“That... That kid... What is he?”

“What else? He’s destined for viewer ratings. We have to make sure he gets into the top 10. He might as well have reserved the real-time rankings for this second half. Ha ha.”

The producer laughed excitedly, but the members of Steel Blade could not laugh. Especially not the vocal and guitarist because they did not have the confidence to push past this storm-like drum with their voice and guitar sound.

Jun Hyuk paid no mind to the attention he was being given and spoke to the drummer,

“You recorded everything, right? Do you think you’ll be able to get something out of it?”

“I’ll have to. But... honestly, I don’t think I’ll be able to copy it 100%.”

Jun Hyuk had instructed him to put some flesh on this skeleton, but he did not even have the confidence to play the skeleton properly.

“Just don’t lose the bass then. That’s the main point here. If you lose the bass drum, the bassist will stand out. The bass guitar and drum are the house. The guitar and vocal are just the interior, so you’ll have to make sure you’re ready.”

The bassist and drummer loved music. The music they would have to play today was miles away from the music they had been playing until now, that they had already forgotten the friction there had been with Jun Hyuk earlier. All they were thinking was that they wanted to quickly master this great music.

“Is it our turn now? I’m a little nervous.”

The vocal and guitarist felt a bit of excitement as they went towards Jun Hyuk. However, Jun Hyuk splashed cold water on their excitement,

“The two of you can just do as you were practicing earlier. The only difference is that you need to pause during the 15 second drum solo in the middle.”

“What?”

“I told you just now. The drum and bass are the house and the guitar and vocal are the interior. The judges will be overwhelmed by the grandeur of the house anyway. They won’t be able to enter the house, so they won’t care too much about the interior.”

“Then what about you? What are you doing?”

“What you said before. I’m just going to scratch out some chords.”

Jun Hyuk left the two who were left dumbfounded at his absurd answer to help the drummer practice.

Chapter 40

The producer gathered the production team and producers for an emergency meeting. The judges who watched Jun Hyuk play the drums on the conference room monitor had the same reaction,

“How many people in Korea can play the drums like that?”

“A monster in the music world is born. Can he play other instruments?”

“Guitar, piano, drum. That means strings, claviers, and percussions. If he does winds, he’s done all of them? He can’t play the trumpet or flute, can he?”

When the judges could not stop talking, Producer Kim Ki Sik felt more confident,

“What do you think? Don’t you think we need to put him in the top 10?”

“We as musicians agree, but do you think the everyday viewer will accept it? There’s still no singing. If you want to put him up there, you need to send that band too. There at least needs to be the validation that he created amazing music.”

No matter what anyone said, it was an audition selecting singers. How could they put a genius who could not sing in the top 10? Everyone had the same thought. It was a waste to eliminate someone like him.

“The judges just need to give him high praises. I’ll edit it somehow to make it acceptable.”

Producer Kim Ki Sik was the only one with confidence. Was it not the producer’s role to make fiction seem like reality?

“Producer Kim, do it well. Make sure there isn’t weird noise that the winner was pre-decided or that we chose based on looks again. In the end, we’re the only ones who get cursed at.”

Last season, when the handsome, ideal man won by an inch, it got to the point where Lee Sung Chul said that he would never be a judge on the show again.

However, the winner was an outstanding prize. He had female fans everywhere and he showed a sense for entertainment shows. A year later, he is on a popular variety show and he is worth a lot of money. Thanks to this, MV channel had been making a great profit.

“Sung Chul, Jun Hyuk doesn’t even have an agency. I’m saying I want to pass a kid like that. It’s not about money, so don’t worry about that.”

Producer Kim Ki Sik already had a picture of how he was going to edit the broadcast until Star Week.

The last of Star Week, the mission stage with the metal band, was going to become the most important component.



The last stage of Star Week. When the four members of Steel Blade and Jun Hyuk took their positions, the stage looked packed.

Once the arrangements were done, the order of how the performances would go on broadcast was up to the producer’s discretion, and the band was given the last turn because they had a lot of instruments to set up.

“I heard a lot of noise earlier. Did you set everything up well?”

Yoon Jung Su laughed while he asked as if he wanted to ease their nerves.

“Yes, it wasn’t really anything. The arrangement came out well too.”

“Jun Hyuk did the arrangement?”

“Yes.”

They needed to keep reminding the viewers that the following music was Jun Hyuk’s work. No matter how little Jun Hyuk has, this song is his song. They needed to point this out.

“Great. Should we listen to it?”

While everyone was tense, Jun Hyuk's gentle guitar stroke adorned the intro. Then the bass came in as if it had been waiting with the drum following.

Vocal Han Ki Su did lose the first beat in the midst of the heaviness, but none of the members paid him any attention. This was a performance where it was overwhelming to successfully carry out each of their own parts.

Until the 1st line sabi (chorus) ended, the four judges moved with the music as though they were feeling the drum's beats.

The drum solo Jun Hyuk had worked with him on came out at the bridge. This was the 15 seconds in which the drummer had to show all of the talent he had not shown as he had been matching his band members' standards up until now.

When the drum solo started, his three members and Jun Hyuk just stared at him intently. This was so they could enter the 2nd verse on time as soon as the drum solo ended.

When 10 seconds of the drumming that sounded like fireworks had passed, Jun Hyuk suddenly stood up with his acoustic guitar.

It was different. An entirely different deployment was unfolding.

The 15 second drum solo was not for the drummer to play as he pleased. That would be an ad lib. The drum solo needed to go as it had been perfectly planned and prepared. It needed to fit in with the complete song and it needed to fuse seamlessly. Had he not polished the 15 second solo to make it perfectly?

However, when 10 seconds passed, the drummer lowered the sound of the bass drum and started to use the tom-tom and snare. It was the type of sound that gives the audience suspense right before a ghost or demon appears in a horror movie.

Due to the change in the drum, the vocal, guitar, and bassist were caught by surprise and the four judges could sense that something was going wrong.

Jun Hyuk approached the drum set with an interesting look on his face.

The drummer did not even realize that Jun Hyuk was standing in front of him. No one could tell if he knew that he was performing something different because all of his focus was on the drum set before him.

Jun Hyuk sat in front of the drum set. The judges now had to look at his back. They did not know when this confounding situation would be over, but Producer Kim Ki Sik did not stop it.

Producer Kim was so thankful that Star Week was pre-recorded that he did not know what to do. This would have been an extreme accident if it had happened during the top 10 live broadcast.

Since the producer in charge was staying still, the judges had no choice but to keep watching. Though they had been caught off-guard at first, as they listened to the drum solo – no, now it needed to be called an ad lib, it gave them marvel.

While the tom-tom and snare had crept in, the hi-hat took over. As the hi-hat steadily released the suspense, a refreshing race began. Jun Hyuk was still on the floor tapping his fingers on the body of the drum, relishing in the rhythm of the drum.

8 minutes passed like this and the drummer held the drumsticks he had been wielding like a whip still. He was out of breath and wiping the sweat off of his forehead when he froze.

It was only then that he realized what he had done.

It was as if time had stopped. Jun Hyuk who was sitting directly in front of the drum set was laughing, and he could see his three members looking devastated. He could also see two judges looking surprised and the other two laughing as though they were having fun from afar.

The drummer was certain of two facts.

They did not finish the mission song and he ruined this entire performance. Once he realized this, he could not lift his head again.

The drummer sat in a silence that seemed to go forever.

“Lift your chin. Why are you like that when you gave such an incredible performance?”

Judge Lee Sung Chul broke the silence.

“I forgot what the mission song was. I don’t know why you hid such talent up till now... You may not be able to become ‘Tomorrow’s Star,’ but you can become the best

drummer representing Korea. I'm guaranteeing it."

The drummer lifted his head at Lee Sung Chul's compliments. When Yoon Jung Su saw the drummer's face, he asked,

"Why did you start an improvised performance? It was completely different from what you practiced, right?"

"I don't really know what I played. I could only see the drum set in front of me and... it felt like my head was empty....."

Yoon Jung Su burst out in laughter at the stuttering drummer.

"Seems like you were possessed by a god. Ha ha."

"That's right. That does happen to musicians at times. Though it is a pity that it happened during a competition. It would have been great if it happened during a show."

However, the relentless commentary did not fail.

Judge Son Ji Young spoke with a bad expression,

"You would receive evaluation from the audience if it were your own concert, but you need to be evaluated on how well you digested a mission song. You realize that it's a situation where you stopped playing the mission song in the middle even if you did keep playing, right? That's something that cannot happen. It was a performance that showed what an amateur you are."

Lee Eun Jin's following assessment was the same,

"The evaluation could have been different if the song had been completed when the drum ended. However, when the solo was over, everyone stood there blankly. How could you make such a mistake? Even if it was a great performance, you all need to know this stage was ruined."

The members of Steel Blade lost even the slightest bit of hope they had. The drummer who had brightened up at the compliments hung his head again. What had he done to his members?



The evaluation ended at Producer Kim Ki Sik's sign and the results were revealed.

Son Jin Young was holding the mic,

"This mission... there isn't a winner. Jang Jun Hyuk and Steel Blade are both eliminated. You worked hard."

The drummer who stumped back to the waiting room could not lift his face and kept repeating his apologies,

"Shit, just beat me up. If I hadn't done something so stupid... I'm really sorry. I have nothing to say."

"It's okay. As he said, we were just included to sort the range of genres. I'm happy that you were able to show your full talent. That's enough, right?"

Vocal and leader Han Ki Su pat the drummer's back. On the one hand, he was also envious. It was not an easy feat to get compliments from Korea's best singer.

The drummer who had been engulfed in the drum's aftertaste, his busy thoughts, and the regret, picked up his things and approached Jun Hyuk,

"Thanks. I'm relieved because of you. I've gained the confidence to say that I'm a drummer wherever I go."

"Don't be too disappointed that you were eliminated from the auditions. You'll get famous anyway."

"Do you want to give me your phone number? Let's keep in touch. Can I go to the cafe you work at?"

"Sure, mister. I want to perform with you again somewhere down the road."

The drummer spoke to Jun Hyuk who saved his phone number,

"Hey! Why are you calling me mister? Call me brother."

"I'll see you later."

He reaffirmed that this young genius did not open up his heart easily.

Chapter 41

All Star Week missions were over, but the top 10 finalists were not decided. There were eight winners because there was another team that had been completely eliminated like Jun Hyuk's.

They needed to pick two more people to complete the top 10.

However, the truth was that the broadcast station had not finished coordinating the last of the contracts they had with the entertainment agencies. The legal and production teams were busy making the final touches.

Once they were finished tuning the contracts with the entertainment agencies, Producer Kim Ki Sik felt like his head was going to explode. They had decided the order of elimination and each team's song selection for the top 10 performances. They had to design the broadcast as if it were a puzzle without any easy pieces.

On top of that, all of this had to align with the contents of the contracts, it had to look natural to the viewers, and the quality of the stages had to be up to par. There were plenty of other audition programs.

His head still hurt when he thought of the verbal abuse they had suffered on the internet last season.

They had put in a song by a girl group that went off a sexy concept without vocals. The participant that had to sing that song was a rock band. The arrangement was good, so they did not think that there would be any issues, but that week's stage theme happened to be 'The Song of My Life'.

The members of the rock band were older than the members of the girl group. In a way, it should have been expected that the viewers would be angry.

Not only did most rock bands not listen to idol or girl group songs, but they got most of their inspiration from British and American rock bands. But it was 'The Song of My Life'! Moreover with a young girl group's song.

This season needed to be perfect. The entertainment market grew by the day. Mistakes

could not be tolerated to the point where the company's profits depended on each broadcast.

"Okay. There's only one person who needs to be added to the top 10 no matter what, right? Nam Seung Hee?"

"Yes. We completed the contract with her agency."

Producer Kim Ki Sik and the production team went into the selection process for the remaining two seats in the top 10.

"Then if we confirm the 9 people... it's exactly 10 if we put Jun Hyuk in there."

Producer Jo spoke cautiously,

"But senior, there are some problems if we do it like this."

"I know. You're talking about the fat kid and the girl with the braces, right?"

"Yes. Kwak Hye Sung and Jang Na Rae. The judges have been giving those two good evaluations as well and their prospects aren't bad either. Kwak Hye Sung could hit it big if he just loses a little weight... and Jang Na Rae seems like she could shine once her braces come out and her looks get better with the limelight."

It went without saying that their singing skills were not a joke either.

"Then why aren't there any calls for them? Agencies these days don't have an eye for these things?"

"Well, I guess it's because of Jun Hyuk. The agencies are only trying to get Jun Hyuk. They're good kids in their own rights, but they can't get any attention because Jun Hyuk overshadows them."

Producer Jo shook his head at the thought of the flood of calls. He picked up dozens of calls from agencies asking for a chance to meet Jang Jun Hyuk everyday.

"The problem is that if we don't put these two up, we'll have to edit everything out. There are a few kids in the top 10 who don't sing as well as these two do. Especially if people like Nam Seung Hee advance, we'll really get feedback that we choose the winners by their looks."

“What do we do? Go with top 12?”

“If we do that, we need to get permission to go on air for another week. Are we okay to do that?”

If there was an episode extension, the main writer had an increase in work and income. The main writer was not a full-time employee, but was working on a contract. The number of episodes directly affected the income. It was bound to be a sensitive issue.

“Pil Jae, go to the consultants and see if we can get another week.”

“Got it.”

Producer Jo and Pil Jae ran to the conference room.

“If we can’t get the extension, we can shorten the two-part epilogue to one. That’s okay, right?”

Producer Kim looked to the main writer as if seeking consent. He had already settled on going with top 12 finalists.

“So we’re decided on doing top 12?”

“Yeah. How much money do we get from the digital sales of two songs? It’s not a bad thing.”

“Isn’t our show going to become top 12 permanently like this?”

“Last season was top 11. It’s fine.”

They finalized their decision to go with the top 12. Kwak Hye Sung and Jang Na Rae did not know that the two of them had gotten on a train from hell to heaven.

“Then make the order for the broadcast with those finalists. Make sure you check the order of eliminations.”

“Yes.”

“I’m going to go get interviews from the additional contestants. Oh right, this Thursday

is the airing of the first episode. Finish up the editing.”

Everyone sighed at Producer Kim’s words. They could say goodbye to eating at home for the next month while the program aired. The conference room seemed to be full of the smell of cup ramen and rice rolls already.



“First, Jung Soo should talk to Jun Hyuk in an interview format. Make it fairly long since I’ll be editing the best parts of it.....”

“Producer Kim, I’m going to do it honestly. If he doesn’t show potential, I’m just going to eliminate him. I’ll interview him if you agree to this. If not, give up on Jun Hyuk.”

It seemed that Judge Yoon Jung Su felt burdened that he was the person allowing Jun Hyuk to advance to the top 10 when he had just been sitting blankly during the last performance. He hit the wall even before his interview with Jun Hyuk. Producer Kim Ki Sik understood Yoon Jung Su’s worries, so he agreed,

“Fine, let’s go with the truth. Since he’s going out on live television without singing, the viewers will be able to accept him to a certain extent if he can convince you. If you need to eliminate him, do it. I’ll give up on him too.”

Yoon Jung Su’s face became brighter as soon as Producer Kim agreed to his terms,

“Oh right, what agency is Nam Seung Hee in?”

“You’re so naive. Why do you think Jin Young came on the show? Ha ha.”

“She’s in JYS? That girl is?”

“Yes. I think they’re trying to make her the second Ji Na. Sexy and pretty good at singing.”

“That’s possible since Nam Seung Hee’s voice is better. Her looks are okay too.”

From the regretful look on his face, it seemed like he had been thinking of bringing her into his agency.

“We also decided to let the fatty and brace face advance. Sung Chul and Lee Eun Jin are going to interview them.”

“Who? Fatty? Brace face? Oh, Kwak Hye Sung and Jang Na Rae. Yeah, those two were a pity to eliminate. You thought well.”

The top 12 were decided and in order to create material for the show, Yoon Jung Su went to meet Jun Hyuk who had already started packing his bags to leave.

Chapter 42

“Music is thought.”

Yoon Jung Su saw Jun Hyuk in a different light when he responded without hesitation. Amateurs tended to think that music was sacred. Usually, the answers to a question like this was that it was their dream, life, or challenge. That was after much contemplation as well.

“Thought? Why?”

“People have all kinds of thoughts all day without a second to spare. It’s because I have music instead of those thoughts.”

“There’s constantly music in your head?”

“Sometimes it’s music and sometimes they’re sounds since sounds are also music. No... is music sounds? It’s confusing.”

Yoon Jung Su thought that fireworks had gone off in his head. Could he have been born with the God-given talent that is said to be lucky to appear once a century?

There is a saying in art and sports: There’s only one way a person who tries hard can beat a person born with talent. He can win if the person born with talent quits.

The first people who recognize a gift are parents. Even today, there are countless children who are led to the doors of famous musicians or artists by their parents. They all say the same words,

“We have no doubt that our child is a genius.”

However, the reply is also always the same,

“No, he has some talent but he is not a genius. He’s simply a little more advanced than the average child. That difference is very insignificant as well.”

The parents leaving all say,

“He can’t even recognize a genius!”

The former world record for the 100m race for 23 years was 0.16 seconds. But the monster Usain Bolt shortened it to 0.14 seconds in a year while beating his own record.

Usain Bolt’s spine is curved due to a congenital disease scoliosis.

As such, there are also people who are born with a talent that others cannot attain with hard work. There is an innate ranking in gifts one is born with.

Yoon Jung Su was curious about the ranking of Jun Hyuk’s talent when he said that he constantly heard music,

“Then do you want to become a star through your music?”

“They said that I don’t need to make an effort to be a star. They said that I would become a star no matter what because I was born a genius.”

“Who said that?”

“My boss.”

“Your boss? Oh, the owner of the cafe you work at?”

“Yes.”

Could it be that a cafe owner who does not know anything is mistaken in believing that Jun Hyuk’s insignificant talent was something incredible? Was this case like with other parents who were under the illusion that their children were geniuses? Is this why Jun Hyuk had such an arrogant personality?

“Why does your boss think that?”

“I never forget a song I hear once and he said that every sound in the world becomes music in my head. All I have to do is get out the music that’s in my head. What did he say that was...?”

“Absolute pitch?”

“Yes, that’s right. Absolute pitch. He said that only a few people are born with this talent and of them, I’m top quality.”

“Remembering music after hearing it once could just mean that you have a really good memory. And getting the music in your head out doesn’t mean that you’re a genius. That music has to be good.”

“Is that right?”

Writing the entire music scores of all instruments in an hour long symphony was impossible with a good memory. This is what the cafe owner said, but music expert Yoon Jung Su was saying something different. Jun Hyuk tilted his head slightly.

Jun Hyuk tried to speak, but was cut off when Yoon Jung Su continued to talk,

“And you’ve only shown us your arrangements until now. You’ve never made your own music. Of course the arranging skills you’ve shown us are outstanding. However, in music you need to have a fundamental creative base. I want to see if you’ve got creative potential.”

At that moment, Jun Hyuk’s eyes sparkled,

“I want to do my music as well, but they keep saying stuff about mission songs and won’t let me do my own.”

“What? Ha ha ha. There is that. Hey, Producer Kim! This is your fault.”

Yoon Jung Su yelled to Producer Kim Ki Sik who was filming the interview from a distance. The fast-thinking VJ filmed this scene including Producer Kim Ki Sik who was laughing in shock.

“Then do you have an original song prepared?”

“I have a lot. I can make a few in a day if I put my mind to it.”

“What? A few songs in one day? Hah.”

The people who created the most songs in the shortest time were children. They made music while constantly humming, but none of the songs were fit to be used.

Teenagers wrote songs by scratching out the guitar chords they are used to hearing. They may not know it themselves, but it was plagiarism. With songs like this, it was possible to make dozens in a day.

“Then should we hear it? What do you think? How about the song you like most out of all the songs you’ve made so far?”

Jun Hyuk thought for a bit and spoke,

“The song I like most is difficult to play right now. It’s a symphony so I need an orchestra.”

“What symphony?”

“Yes. Oh... right. There’s something I made not too long ago. During the 2nd mission with Nam Seung Hee, I made a song that would be perfect for her tone. I’ll play that for you.”

Yoon Jung Su was taken aback by the two words, symphony and orchestra, that Jun Hyuk had just said. What did he mean, symphony?

The only famous Korean composer was Yoon Yi Sang. From Kyeongnam, Tongyong, he performed in Germany and was proudly chosen to be in New York Metropolitan Museum’s 20 contemporary musicians.

No other composer came to mind. Of course there was a decrease in the number of people composing symphonies these days, but this was an issue of basic skills.

How could a teenager he had thought of as immature talk about symphonies?

Yoon Jung Su wanted to hang on to Jun Hyuk and ask him, but he was already sitting at a piano,

“Teacher, I’ll start now.”

Jun Hyuk smiled brightly as he started playing the piano. That smile did not disappear until the music ended.

Yoon Jung Su pictured a Pocari Sweat commercial from Jun Hyuk’s song. Warm sunlight, a beautiful blue sea. Greece’s Santorini with walls as white as a swan.

The piano melody was smooth, beautiful, and clear.

“What do you think? Teacher? Are you okay?”

“Huh? Oh, it’s good. Really.”

There was nothing else to say. It was good. Really good. It could be played for at least 20 years.

“You said you made this two days ago? During the 2nd mission?”

“Yes. Nam Seung Hee sang the Finkl song as a jazz song then. But it seemed like ballads are perfect for that girl.”

“So you just made a ballad song on the spot?”

“Yes.”

“How about the lyrics? What is it about? Did you write them?”

“Oh, I can’t write lyrics.”

“You haven’t written them?”

“No, I’m saying I can’t write lyrics. It hasn’t been long since I learned hangul... and I’m not very good at expressing emotions with words.”

He could not believe that it had not been long since Jun Hyuk learned hangul, but he remembered Jun Hyuk’s past and shut his mouth. Expressing emotions. Expression itself is spoken or in writing. Expressing with speech and writing is literature.

Jun Hyuk had learned too little to express himself in words. When Yoon Jung Su did not speak, Jun Hyuk said something unexpected,

“Could you perhaps write the lyrics?”

“What? Me?”

“Yes, you write songs well.”

“I don’t know. You made the song. You have to write the lyrics according to your emotions. Isn’t it weird if I write them?”

“No... I took my emotions and made the song, so couldn’t you write the lyrics according to the emotions you felt by listening to it?”

Jun Hyuk’s potential had already been confirmed after hearing the song he made for Nam Seung Hee. There was also a reason why he did not sing and was persistent on playing instrumentals. His intention was to give everyone listening to his music the freedom to feel and interpret it.

Yoon Jung Su realized that Jun Hyuk had the capacity to become an impressive musician instead of being just another singer.

Kim Ki Sik who had been filming this entire interview smiled widely as he thought that he had killed two birds with one stone. A song created for one girl. Yoon Jung Su confirmed Jun Hyuk’s musicality with this song and the camera had filmed his feelings for Nam Seung Hee.

All that was left was what viewers called the devil’s edit.

Chapter 43

Producer Kim Ki Sik who had watched the first episode's edit compilation picked out two points of significance as an artist chooses the emphasis of a work.

"Only include Jun Hyuk and Nam Seung Hee's previews. Don't change it or make it with the kids who sing well."

"Do you want to blur their faces?"

"No, both of their faces are their weapons. Just put in 10 seconds of Nam Seung Hee in the middle. Mix pieces of Jun Hyuk's story together and put it in the ending. Just 15 seconds. End it with a close-up of his face. Okay?"

"Isn't it too blatant?"

"So let's see it. We can see which would be better to air. We'll see if Jun Hyuk can or can't beat everyone's singing with just his looks. Don't put Jun Hyuk's story in tomorrow's press release, either."

"Take him out of the press release?"

"Yeah. We're going to pit the 15 minutes of exposure against the whole program without borrowing the strength of a press release."

The limitations of a live broadcast. Jun Hyuk's performance without singing could not bring out the liveliness of the scene. His intention was to see if Jun Hyuk could make up for these shortcomings and get him to the top 5 if it was possible.

"Then, how about the top 10 tournament? You planned everything without any contract violations, right?"

"Yes. We'll progress with this order if you confirm, and start allocating the mission songs."

"Okay. Let's see it."

The contestants in the top 12 would live together for 40 days while preparing for the live broadcast, sweating to be the best. However, that sweat cannot push someone to the top spot. Their dreams were being decided in this conference room following a contract that adults made.

“First, how many are there in large agencies?”

“Four people. We already finished talks with these. There’s no need to advance two of them any further. According to their contracts, we only need to get them on the first stage of the live broadcast.”

“So they’ll be the first two to be eliminated?”

“Yes.”

Top 10 decided.

“The remaining two are automatically the next to be eliminated?”

“Yes. Articles saying they are signing with their respective agencies will go out once the program is over, and we’ll get 20% of their profits after they debut.....”

Top 8 decided.

“The cable channel didn’t ask for anything?”

“We aren’t told what the contract with the cable channel says. It’s not even the top 5 but the early eliminations so.....”

“There are three kids without agencies. These are the next people to be eliminated.”

“Right.”

Top 5 decided.

“You’ve only planned the rest of the kids to top 5, right?”

“Yes. I’m sure they’re thinking that they’ve chosen through enough if we’ve reached the top 5.”

The broadcast station and agencies knew after going through four seasons that there was enough publicity if they just got to the top 5.

“No one has requested the top 3 yet”

“No.”

Up to here was the middle of the betting race where the agencies were gathered. The agencies would watch the broadcast and see the reactions. Following that reaction, they would decide if they would bet more or put their cards down.

“Oh yeah, there’s a place requesting the win. Jessica. You know Mango Entertainment, right?”

“Mango? The company that a manager from SN created when he left? Mango keeps pushing for it?”

“Yes. Their investors are good and they have two good idol teams. They prepared this girl a lot and are busy trying to make her the 2nd Park Jung Hyun.”

It was fully possible. She had received high praises from the judges during the area preliminaries when they did not know which agency she was in. She had proved that her vocals were perfected with four years as a trainee.

“Did they say they signed with a cable channel?”

“Yes. The deal being made is that if they make them 1st place, they take 20% of the profits for 5 years and they’ll put the debut song on the top three stations, and on the condition that they make 1st place on the music program, they take 20% of the profits for 2 years.”

The total profit they discussed was not just the money brought in from music. Advertisements and TV appearances were also included. The only money they could not take was what was made from performing at events. Since most did not bill their taxes, it was difficult to identify the revenue. If they stopped billing the taxes? They would definitely take it.

“Five years? The condition is good. Most places end it after three years.”

“They’re asking us to make her number one no matter what.”

“Say she wins, who’s working on her debut song? Nothing matters if the song sucks... She won’t be able to gain popularity.”

“They’re thinking of taking the safe route. They’re going to release a single and work on a remake album. Apparently, they even got the copyrights.”

It was evident that they had prepared thoroughly. It was up to Jessica whether this preparation would go on to become a success or end with failure.

“What about the remaining four?”

“There isn’t much difference between them. They only asked to be in the top 5 anyway. The conditions are the customary 20% for two years. Their intention is to watch the response and act then.”

This is how the size of these youths’ dreams were decided. Producer Kim Ki Sik brought up his hidden card Jun Hyuk,

“The problem is Jun Hyuk... How far should we advance him? Put him in 5th place?”

“I really think I’m going to go crazy.”

Producer Jo looked upset as soon as discussion on Jun Hyuk started.

“Because Jun Hyuk doesn’t listen?”

“Jun Hyuk doesn’t listen but it’s also the cafe owner who is his guardian. I tell him I’ll link him with an entertainment agency, but he doesn’t listen. He says he’s not interested.”

“I think he’s trying to make his own agency with Jun Hyuk as his poster boy. Aren’t there a lot of people like that?”

“It’s obvious. Even if that cafe owner really makes an agency and tries to train Jun Hyuk, it’s impossible and he doesn’t know that.”

This industry’s entertainment market was run on a system. At the center of that system was money and networking.

Just because a Misari cafe owner discovered a kid with talent did not mean that

everything went the way he planned. If the cafe owner was in his early 30s, he might be able to settle around 10 years later. However, he was already in his mid-40s. It was an impossible dream.

“So what I’m trying to say is that Dine Music is going after Jun Hyuk the most and they want to do some work. What should I do?”

“Dine?”

“Yes. Dine is big in Japan. They say with Jun Hyuk’s looks and skills, he’d do better in Japan than in Korea... Japan’s performing arts can’t be compared with ours.”

“Hm, that sounds good.”

As the main producer showed a positive reaction, Assistant Director Pil Jae’s face brightened. Producer Kim thought that guy must have at least been invited to drink with Dine Music.

“Right? That’s what Dine Music was saying. If he just does two years of promotions, he has the potential to earn at least \$100,000 easily after.”

“So? How do they want to work?”

“They’re going to make the cafe owner into a villainous thief.”

“Thief?”

“Yes. He brought on an orphan and didn’t pay him anything for his labor. If that wasn’t bad enough, he’s trying to exploit him for money just because he has a talent in music. He didn’t take any measures while he was bothering him for two years and just because he went out on broadcast, he acquired guardianship. This type of story.”

“It’s true. He he.”

“These were revealed as clear facts. I think it’ll work too.”

The production team sitting in the conference room and Dine Music did not have feelings of animosity or resentment toward the cafe owner, Yoon Kwang Hun. This was just work. Everyone thought this way. They needed to do a good job to make money and to do this, they needed to address whatever made their work difficult.

Yoon Kwang Hun was just an obstacle to their work.

“That’s something Dine Music needs to do on their own. We can just forget about it in the meantime. They can go through with it or not.”

Producer Kim was certain that Assistant Director Pil Jae had been approached by Dine Music when he quickly started talking after he said to forget about it,

“About that... It seemed like they wanted us to help out a bit.”

“Us? How are we supposed to help them?”

“It’s obvious that Jun Hyuk will become one of the trending topics next week when the show airs. They said they were going to spread the articles then.....”

The assistant director hesitated a bit.

“So?”

“Jun Hyuk can’t see the articles. It’s all over if Jun Hyuk tells reporters that the cafe owner is like his father.”

“So they’re asking us to cover his eyes and ears?”

“Yes. He goes into the boarding house this week anyway. If we make sure they don’t get internet and phone access... They can end it in three weeks. And we have to make sure the people around him don’t say anything as well.”

It was certain that this assistant director was deeply involved with Dine Music as he was acting as their messenger altogether.

Producer Kim did not want to reproach him. He had been working as an assistant director in the strenuous world of variety programs for three years. If he had not had these kinds of bonuses, he would have quit a long time ago.

“For free?”

“Excuse me?”

Producer Kim smirked at the assistant director,

“To do that, they need us no matter what. What you just said is that we need to completely cut Jun Hyuk off from the outside.”

Assistant Director Pil Jae tried to see whether or not Producer Kim was angry first. Producer Kim had already figured it out that he had gone to the room salon with someone from Dine Music. Fortunately, he did not seem angry.

“We need to prepare the foundation. They’re asking us to edit the highlights of the hard life Jun Hyuk had as an orphan and his miserable life for when the broadcast airs. That way, the article about his exploitation as a slave will become bigger news.”

No one could speak. This was not just an issue of Dine Music. The broadcast production team was becoming an accomplice. It meant that they were getting actively involved in making one person into garbage.

“Pil Jae.”

“Yes.”

“Tell Dine Music to come in. Someone higher than an executive. Someone with a say. We need to decide after hearing the master plan. Schedule a meeting for today. The broadcast goes out next week so we don’t have time. Oh right, tell the legal team to join the meeting as well.”

“I’ll do that.”

“We need to progress with these things thoroughly since we’re taking a lot of risks.”

Assistant Director Pil Jae may be content with having drinks, but this did not cut it close for the main producer, Kim Ki Sik. He wanted to receive a secret offer from Dine Music.

Chapter 44

As Jun Hyuk had said, people from apparel brand XOR came to the cafe. The XOR officials were edgy while Yoon Kwang Hun read through the contract meticulously.

The broadcast had warned them that the cafe owner was very precise. They still had not thought that he would read through all six pages of the contract.

Yoon Kwang Hun began to speak once he was done reading the contract,

“The main point is this? If he has a scandal during the year after ‘Tomorrow’s Star’ starts, we need to compensate the damages. Is that right?”

“Ah... yes. That is content that is typically included.”

“Hm, sir. I guess you haven’t heard the rumors yet?”

Yoon Kwang Hun put the contract down and coughed.

“Excuse me?”

“Jun Hyuk punched another kid during Star Week.”

“Oh, we know about that.”

“He’s a kid plenty capable of cursing at the judges. Live broadcast? He doesn’t know what that means because he doesn’t care about the cameras once he goes into his music. But live like the ideal child for one year? This is asking us not to sign on.”

“Hey, sir. You’re being too much. Surely he won’t cause any accidents on live broadcast?”

“It’s true. What I’m most worried about is that he’ll say ‘You don’t know shit and you’re being annoying!’ if the judges say something he doesn’t agree with.”

The XOR Manager’s face brightened,

“We’re grateful if he causes scandals like that. Ha ha.”

“Excuse me?”

“The concept of this season’s jean is the rebel. We chose Jun Hyuk based on that concept. He doesn’t fear the judges and says what he wants? This overlaps with a teenager rebelling against a teacher or adult. Kids like it. The terms you pointed out are in reference to issues like drinking and assaulting someone, drugs, girls.”

“What... a 17 year old and alcohol, drugs, girls?”

Yoon Kwang Hun had not even thought of such absurd situations. Did people in the entertainment industry act like adults no matter what age they were on they gained fame?

“If Jun Hyuk becomes famous once the program ends, he’ll be called to different places, go to parties for his album release... there will be accidents. Especially with Jun Hyuk, girls will be all over him. He’s at an age where he won’t be able to say no. That’s why kids have management companies. The companies resolve all of these types of accidents. The reason why people like the larger companies is that they stop the articles no matter how big a scandal is. The reporters are scared of them.”

They just had to stay quiet until ‘Tomorrow’s Star’ was over. Jun Hyuk was staying in a boarding house until the end of the program anyway. Whatever the XOR official was worried about would not be a problem.

Once the program was over, Jun Hyuk needed to focus on studying abroad and not on become a celebrity as everyone else was assuming.

Jun Hyuk could not bear being ordered around. The life of a celebrity was hard. He had to do what he was told until he became a recognized star.

“Then let’s do this. Let’s write out what the ‘unsavory acts’ are specifically. The drugs, assault, girls, et cetera you spoke of. Doesn’t a contract need to be specific?”

“That sounds good. We’ll change that part. Do you have any other suggestions?”

“Four poster shoots and two promotional video shoots. This video is for the TV?”

“No, it’s internet advertising. Of course if Jun Hyuk has enough star power, they could go on TV.”

“Then let’s agree to that.”

“Are you satisfied with the guarantee?”

“I realize that \$20,000 for a total rookie is a very generous condition. Isn’t it normally \$5,000?”

The XOR Manager’s face brightened. When they were first drafting the contract, they were grappling with \$5,000 and were allowed to go a little higher, but the marketing director cut everyone off bluntly. She said that he was a model worth the expense. She also said that he might turn against XOR indefinitely if they went too hard from the beginning. The XOR marketing director had a conviction about Jun Hyuk.

The XOR Manager did not lose his chance when Yoon Kwang Hun showed satisfaction at the guarantee,

“Thank you for recognizing this. It really is a generous condition. Our Director really has an eye for people. Jun Hyuk will become a star. Our Director is sure of it.”

The XOR Manager left the cafe saying that he would bring back a revised contract.



That night, Yoon Kwang Hun and Jun Hyuk watched the first episode of ‘Tomorrow’s Star’ together at the cafe. Yoon Kwang Hun watched while drinking a beer, waiting for Jun Hyuk to come out, but all that aired of him was 10 seconds after 1 hour and 20 minutes.

“Hey! Did you know you weren’t coming out this week?”

“No. They didn’t say anything about that.”

Jun Hyuk must have been fascinated that he was on TV because he was a little excited. TV has a strange charm. One begins to think that he is special.

Yoon Kwang Hun worried about what he had to do if Jun Hyuk became more concerned about becoming a star than he did about his music, but it was already too late. He brought up another topic to ease his ominous thoughts,

“Is the girl whose preview came on in the middle Nam Seung Hee? She’s pretty.”

“Right? Truthfully, she does look prettier on the TV screen. I’m going to try to get her to go out with me while we’re living in the boarding house.”

“Why? She said she’s interested in you too?”

“I have to blow her away. I’m going to make her a song. There’s no problem. He he.”

“Do well with her, but you can’t cause any trouble. Oh right, when you go into the boarding house tomorrow, they’ll make you do all sorts of things. They’re going to make you exercise and dance. You saw last season, right?”

“It’s okay. If they bother me too much, I can just quit everything and get out of there. Those people can’t cut me. I overheard them talking about how I’ll be the factor guaranteeing their viewer ratings this season. Ha ha.”

It was understandable since he was a kid who had survived on watching for other people’s reactions alone. He would be able to figure out that he is necessary just by looking at the faces of the staff members.

“Anyway, don’t act too much on your impatience and go along with what they say for the most part. Do what you can and if there’s something you really can’t do, don’t throw a tantrum and go tell the producer.”

“Yes, I understand.”

“You’re really going out in society now. You were on the boundaries of society when you were living alone, but it’s not like that anymore. Now, you have to fit in to a certain extent. You also have to learn to be patient until you become a person that no one can touch.”

“Don’t worry. Am I a child?”

“You’re being cocky. Hey, you’re still a kid.”

Yoon Kwang Hun felt that his nagging was unusually long and shut his mouth to start cleaning the cafe. Jun Hyuk was like his son, but he did not want to become like other fathers and sons. He wanted to be like an uncle and at times, a close friend.

“Go to sleep early. You have to go all the way to Sangam-dong tomorrow morning. Are you done packing?”

“They told me that I don’t need to bring anything. They’ll give me all the clothes I need to wear once I get there... even the underwear and socks. I’ll just take my guitar.”

“Sure. I’ll come early in the morning.”

“No, that’s okay. I can just take the bus.”

“It’s fine. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Yoon Kwang Hun who came early in the morning to drop Jun Hyuk off in Sangam-dong thought he might know how parents feel when they are sending their children far away.

Chapter 45

A week later. The 2nd episode of ‘Tomorrow’s Star’ finally started. Yoon Kwang Hun watched the broadcast with interest. However, he turned the TV off when it ended with Jun Hyuk playing Jung Tae Jun’s ‘Poet’s Town’.

He was uncomfortable.

They had only highlighted the dark and pitiful parts of Jun Hyuk’s past. They had clearly said that he played eight versions of the song, but they did not even air a full minute of this guitar performance.

Instead, an interview over 3 minutes on his past came out with a scene of him sitting dejectedly alone in the waiting room with melancholic background music and a narration of his depressing story.

It was as he had expected. The broadcast station had taken the direction of concepts like the forced pity and success story. Yoon Kwang Hun went to bed with the uneasy thoughts hoping that they would highlight more of Jun Hyuk’s music during Star Week.

The next morning, Yoon Kwang Hun received a phone call from an employee opening the cafe in Jun Hyuk’s place,

“You’re already at work? You’re working hard since Jun Hyuk isn’t here.”

– Boss. It’s crazy here.

“Why? What’s going on this early in the morning?”

– Reporters are swarming the front of the cafe.

The strength of a broadcast was scary. It seemed Jun Hyuk had already become a hot topic after his first appearance yesterday.

“It’s okay. Jun Hyuk’s air time went on broadcast. That’ll be why they’re there.”

– No! I’m telling you that’s not it. Boss, go on the internet. It’s no joke!

When Yoon Kwang Hun put down the phone and turned on his laptop, he felt as though he had been hit across the back of his head with a stone.

The top three real-time searches on the largest portal site were Jang Jun Hyuk, Tomorrow's Star, and 'villainous cafe owner'.

'Villainous cafe owner?'

This had to be him.

"Hey, I'll call you later. Hang up."

Yoon Kwang Hun read through each article on the portal site and grimaced.

[Tomorrow's Star, Hot Topic Guitarist. Jang Jun Hyuk. 2 Years of Slave Labor?]

[Life of Slavery After a Life on the Streets?]

[Cafe Owner's Identity? A Good Samaritan Taking in an Orphan? A Villain Bothering a Penniless Child?]

[Living at a Cafe? Locked Up?]

Yoon Kwang Hun shut his laptop.

He had worried that Jun Hyuk might get hurt from his past being revealed because of the broadcast, but this was unexpected. The arrows were shooting at his own direction.

"These assholes!"

Yoon Kwang Hun paced his room and picked up his phone,

"Hey, it's me... Starting today, don't go to work until I say otherwise. Close the cafe doors now and just go home. Hang a sign to say that we're temporarily closed."

He lit a cigarette and read the articles again. They made him out to be a villainous thief in subtle wording. It was not something he could keep avoiding. He even thought he might need to go to Jun Hyuk's boarding house and go into a press conference.

Just then, he thought of someone he could consult with. Yoon Kwang Hun hesitated for a moment before he picked up his cellphone. He was reluctant for a while until he dialed the phone number.

To call someone he had not been in contact with for a long time to ask for a favor? Was this not the same as texting a wedding invitation to a long forgotten high school classmate? Nonetheless, this was the only person he had to go to for help. Yoon Kwang Hun hit send.

He heard an overly friendly voice over the phone,

– Wow, is this really Yoon Kwang Hun? How long has it been?

“Is this Seung Ho? You haven’t deleted my phone number yet?

– Why would I delete your number? I just haven’t contacted you first because it seemed you were avoiding me. How are you?

“Seung Ho, I’ll give you the details later, but I need your help. I’ve fallen into a bit of an embarrassing situation.”

– Why? What happened? Are you still working with funds? Didn’t you quit all of that to run a cafe and live freely?

“No, that’s not it but look at Naver. You’ll know then. Look at all of it and call me back.”

Yoon Kwang Hun hung up and just got in his car. As he rode the freeway, he saw a milestone that read Hyeyiri. He turned into the direction of the Hyeyiri sign and stopped at the first cafe he saw to order coffee and wait for the phone call.

However, two hours passed and there was no call.

‘Shoot. Did I contact him for no reason?’

He drank his iced coffee to cool the burning inside.

Baek Seung Ho was a lawyer at the law firm Future Asset had partnered with at the time when he was making hundreds of millions.

They had been close as they got along well and had gone drinking together two or

three times a week, but Yoon Kwang Hun had cut all contact when he lost everything and left the industry.

Yoon Kwang Hun had deliberately avoided anyone linked to his swanky past. But this is when he needed a reliable friend.

He had contacted him thinking that he would help due to the friendship that had before but... was that friendly voice just a courtesy? Yoon Kwang Hun felt embarrassed that he had become a forgotten failure to Baek Seung Ho.

He decided that he needed to find a motel to stay at for the time being because he could not go back to his house or cafe. He left the cafe and walked around Hyeyiri before drinking a beer.

A restaurant employee looked at Yoon Kwang Hun pathetically as he drank a beer before lunchtime, but he did not have the luxury to mind such attention. He was more hurt by the fact that he had become a nuisance to someone than he was by the verbal abuse on the internet.

He left the restaurant once he was in a completely drunken state to avoid the eyes of the restaurant employees. He stopped at a convenience store to buy canned beers and went to a motel. He drank until he passed out in a motel room.

Chapter 46

He woke up to his phone's constant ringing. He was scared to pick up the phone. Could it be a reporter? The caller ID said that it was Baek Seung Ho.

When he slid to accept the call, there was a sound so loud he thought the phone was on speaker mode,

– What are you doing that you don't pick up your phone! Do you know how many times I called you since yesterday!

“What? Yesterday? What time is it right now?”

– Good job. You're just at peace. I stayed up all night.

Yoon Kwang Hun opened the motel room's thick curtains and the bright sunlight spilled into the room.

– Did you pass out drinking? Oy. It's a mystery as to how you were a fund manager with such a fragile mentality.

As Yoon Kwang Hun drank a glass of water to quench his dry throat, he came to his senses,

“Did you call a lot yesterday?”

– Look at your call log. Anyway, congratulations. I'll have to buy you a drink later. You've hit 1st place in real-time searches. Ha ha ha.”

He almost teared up. He was not yet a nuisance to Baek Seung Ho. There was still a person who was willing to help him.

“I was in 3rd place before, now I'm 1st?”

– Congratulations, you're a famous person. No, are you a celebrity?

“Stop talking nonsense. What do I have to do?”

– Let’s check one thing first. Why did you keep Jang Jun Hyuk? You’re not one to use an orphan just to save on employee wages. What’s your reason?

“I did it for humanity. Why?”

– What gibberish is this? Are you still drunk?

“Hey! If it were you, would you take on the 21st century Mozart to serve in the hall?”

– 21st century Mozart?

“Yeah. Jun Hyuk is a real genius. He’s a kid who’s received a gift that God gives every 100 years. You... you don’t trust my judgment? You know I have an ear for music.”

Music was another reason why Baek Seung Ho and Yoon Kwang Hun had gotten close. They were both music enthusiasts regardless of the genre whether it was classic, rock, blues, jazz, et cetera. But Mozart? He was exaggerating.

Whenever we call a helpline, the waiting melody is always Mozart’s ‘Eine kleine Nachtmusik’. 80% of the world’s helpline melodies were Mozart, 10% was Vivaldi, and the last 10% was pop music with royalties to pay.

Hotel lobbies, lounges, and elevators all over the world greeted their clients with Mozart. If Mozart were to receive royalties, he would make the amount to buy his country Austria every year, and his handwritten scores would be worth over \$200,000 each.

Mozart shared the title of genius with Einstein. How could he compare Jun Hyuk to a person like that.....

– Well... Let’s say that’s true. Why did he go out on that audition program? If he’s Mozart, he needs to go to New York or Vienna. Why Sangam-dong?

“Honestly, I sent him to be around kids his age and it seemed like he wanted to go out too. He wanted to show his music, so I sent him to get some experience. Who knew it would turn out like this?”

Baek Seung Ho seemed to be organizing his thoughts. He did not speak for a while.

– Do you want to leave this to the discretion of our company? I’ll ruin these assholes

for you.

“Hey, I don’t have money. How can I work with one of the top two law firms in the country? I called to get your opinion.”

– Would I take money from you? After I got your call, I had our investigators look into it a bit.

“Already?”

There was a reason why Baek Seung Ho had not called yesterday. After looking at the articles on the portal site, he had even enlisted investigators to determine the circumstances before and after the incident. He had called once he had the reassurance and made up his mind.

He had forgotten. Yoon Kwang had allocated all of his work to Baek Seung Ho because he had liked this kind of work ethic.

– Of course. You think I was playing all day? Anyway, it seems Jun Hyuk really is a treasure as you say. They’re playing with the press on the internet. It’s a scheme to discredit your guardianship over Jun Hyuk so an agency can take him.

“What the fuck. I knew they would do that.”

– You should have kept your treasure hidden. What were you thinking sending him out into the world? It’s full of thieves.

“Stop. I’m full of regrets as it is.”

– These days, the entertainment industry makes a lot of money from this Hallyu thing. And Jun Hyuk’s really good looking. If he really is a music genius as you say, he’s a golden egg.

“Then will you take care of it for me? You deal with the money issue as well.”

– Let me just ask one thing before that.”

“Go ahead.”

– Are you trying to raise him yourself? Like making a management agency?

That was greed. It was an era where talent directly became money. If that talent was in the entertainment industry, it was enough to make anyone greedy.

Baek Seung Ho thought that Yoon Kwang Hun might be trying to reclaim the glory of his past through Jun Hyuk.

Yoon Kwang Hun's unexpected reply invalidated Baek Seung Ho's guess,

"No, I was thinking of sending him to America or Europe by next year. I was just going to take responsibility up to there. His talent isn't something anyone can raise or whatnot. If you just throw him into bigger waters, the big fish around him will automatically gather to him."

There was a silence again. Baek Seung Ho's voice came out low after the silence,

– You... really put your heart into it. You don't have any selfish intentions for this. I'm seeing you in a different light.

"Hey, this kid! What are you talking about all of a sudden."

– Okay. I'll take care of this, you just disappear for a bit. Even if the talk gets worse, don't pay attention to it for the time being.

Yoon Kwang Hun fully understood what Baek Seung Ho was saying.

He meant that he was going to wait until the editors had completely ruined Yoon Kwang Hun. Once they had ripped Yoon Kwang Hun apart and made him nothing more than a rag, he was going to sue them for an enormous amount. He was going to empty the pockets of the editors responsible.

"Understood. Oh right, I'm in Hyeyiri right now."

– Okay. Oh, and once people get a hold of your identity, you'll be getting a ton of texts and calls abusing you. Don't turn your phone off because you're angry. I'll send one of our employees right now. Until our employee gets there, pick up all your calls and record everything. Don't say a word in response and just record it. The employee is going to bring a cellphone and a warrant, so sign the warrant and use that phone if you need to call. Give your cellphone to the employee. We'll handle it.

Threatening texts and calls were going to be converted into money. They were about

to see the real face of a vicious lawyer.

– Text me the address of where you’re at now.

“Alright. And Seung Ho.”

– Yea.

“Be careful not to hurt Jun Hyuk.”

– Oy. You worry too much. Is Jun Hyuk your son? Rest for a bit.

“Okay. Thanks.”

– No problem. It’ll be over in three weeks at the most. Hyeyiri’s nice. Read a bit, go for walks, and rest. Don’t drink.

Once he hung up, his mind was at rest. All he had to do now was wait. Yoon Kwang Hun passed out on the bed again.

Chapter 47

The 12 finalists needed to shine for a quality broadcast while living together for around 40 days. Going forward, they would have an expert's help in looking good, their first step to stardom. They believed they had boarded an Autobahn to stardom.

Without knowing what would happen to Yoon Kwang Hun in a week, Jun Hyuk unpacked his belongings with the other 11 contestants in a dormitory not far from Sangam-dong. As soon as they were done unpacking their bags, the staff began going over their schedules.

"First, everyone gets up at 7. You can't talk for two hours after you wake up. You're resting your voice until 9. For those two hours, stretch and wake your body to open your mouth."

These were the first instructions given when starting as an agency trainee. Only the three contestants who were not in agencies felt like they were entering a new world.

"Second, there's a ton of food in the dorm fridge and sink cupboard. It's not there for you to eat, but for advertising. The only thing you guys can have to your heart's content is water. The only food you can eat is what we give you. Third, cameras are filming everywhere except inside the 2nd floor bathroom. Watch the way you act and use the 2nd floor bathroom to take care of your business and to shower. It's good to wash your face on the 1st floor though. Do as you please since you could be wasting your air time. Washing your face will go out on broadcast if the picture looks good."

A world where even washing your face was part of a production. This was the perfect chance for a girl who had confidence in her face without makeup.

"Fourth, be aware of the consequences if you try to escape from the dorm to do something stupid. We were a little lax until last season, but we're going to be extremely strict this time. Listen well. The final selection for the top 12 doesn't go out for another five weeks. That means we can change it whenever we want. If someone tries to Shawshank their way out, they'll be cut right away and someone else will take that spot. Keep that in mind."

Everyone tensed at all of the threats. The staff also let them know that they would only

be progressing with fitness and vocal training for a week.

“There’s a bus waiting outside, so everyone change into workout clothing. Hurry because we’ll be leaving in 20 minutes.”

Jun Hyuk rose his hand slowly and spoke,

“I didn’t bring any clothes. They told me not to bring anything.....”

“Oh, the sponsors prepared everything for you already. They’re in the room you were assigned on the 2nd floor, so go change. Also, there are dates written on the tags so make sure you look at that. You have to change every day.”

The assignments had been decided so that there were three people to a room, but it seemed that Jun Hyuk’s room was the biggest because one wall was full of clothes.

Everyone looked at the sponsored clothing with jealousy. They would all get sponsored clothing for the live broadcast, but they could not help but envy Jun Hyuk who was being sponsored through the dorming period.

In fact, they were more envious that he already had a modeling contract than they were of the clothes. They wanted to ask how much he had received as a guarantee than how many items of clothing he was given, but it hurt their pride to do so.

Everyone scattered off to their own rooms at the words of Kwak Hye Sung who was sharing the room with Jun Hyuk,

“I’m American obese so I could only be sponsored by a clothing store in Itaewon,” were the first words out of his new roommates’ mouth.



There were three trainers waiting at the fitness center.

“The three of us are going to manage your bodies for the next month. If you follow our instructions, you’ll be able to have a surprising body even after one month.”

The production crew filmed the trainers’ friendly greeting and the 12 participants’ tense expressions. As soon as the cameras were turned out, their gentle smiles

disappeared and the way they spoke changed 180 degrees.

“You! Listen well. You have to lose more than 20kg over a month. What do you think the best method of losing weight is?”

“Exercising well...”

“That’s if you have the body of average kids. Don’t eat. You need to starve.”

Kwak Hye Sung put down his heated face and could not speak.

“We’ll be able to see your jawline at the least if you lose around 15kg. It’s a nuisance to have your chubby face go out on broadcast. What did the viewers do wrong? Don’t you think so?”

It was like this everywhere. Authority needed to be established during the first meeting. They needed to be tied up tightly to be able to digest their schedules. This was the best way to get young kids who were used to doing what they wanted to listen.

“Four pieces of chicken breast and a plate of salad will be the amount of food you have everyday. There’s sponsored food in your dorm, right? Things like instant rice, curry, soup? If you try to eat any of that you’ll have to starve for a week so be careful.”

The three trainers checked each person’s bodies and gave prescriptions as though they were doctors.

The trainer looking at Jun Hyuk sighed,

“Whew... You wasted a blessed body. What is this? You’re so skinny... What a waste.”

“Isn’t he worth working with? He’d look great if he just does some strength training.”

“Right? We’ll feed him some gaynor powder and chicken breast, and try to build his upper body.”

“I don’t need to exercise because I don’t intend on singing with my shirt off.”

Jun Hyuk must have been intimidated by the muscular trainers surrounding him because he did not speak in his usual defiant tone. He was very careful.

“We’re not building your body so you can sing with your shirt off. Why do you think we’re training you guys for free? It’s because you guys are going on broadcast. We’re going to plaster the change in your body after one month on that wall over there. That’s the reason we’re trying to make your body look good. Understand?”

The trainer spoke loudly for everyone to hear. Once the dorm life and live broadcasts, everyone was going to understand that the world revolved on money and that they were being made into commodities.

Chapter 48

“Pronunciation is first. The purpose of vocal training is to find the right sound, not to teach you how to sing well. All I’m doing is helping you to make the proper sound from your body as an instrument. The first step to that proper sound is pronunciation.”

Vocal trainer Ryu Sun Hee’s confident attitude and clear voice made the 12 contestants even more nervous. The best vocal trainer who had taught several famous singers.

As they were already tired from spending all morning with the rigorous schedule they had been given by the fitness trainers, it was unnecessary to yell “Don’t use strength in your body!” at them.

“Come out and sing the song you’re most confident in one by one. Sing the song you’re best at. Don’t do something hard or something you want to do.”

It was necessary to fix the voices they normally spoke with first.

“You try singing first.”

Kwak Hye Sung was resentful of his body. He stood out wherever he went. After starving all day and running hard, a gentle song flew out of him gently,

“Another da~y gets further.”

Ryu Sun Hee grimaced at the first line of Kim Kwang Suk’s ‘Around 30’,

“Stop. It’s not further, it’s farther. You need to write the lyrics on a piece of paper and read it. Don’t sing until you can read it accurately. Got it?”

“Yes.”

Everyone sang in turn, but were torn apart in the introductions and had to start practicing reading the lyrics like Kwak Hye Sung. There were two people who did not hear Ryu Sun Hee’s criticism. It was 1st place nominee Jessica who was receiving harsh training at Mango Entertainment and Lee Hae Jun who was only 18 years old but had started as a trainee when he was 13 years old.

Since Lee Hae Jun found out he had to share a room with Jun Hyuk, he had been down. He was displeased that the only other contestant in his teens was already receiving celebrity treatment.

Lee Hae Jun had been watching the rules of this industry for five years already. It was a place where he had to stay afloat amidst constant comparison with others. It did not leave his head that Jun Hyuk who was also in his teens was his rival. This opponent was too strong.

It seemed the production crew had given Ryu Sun Hee advanced notice about Jun Hyuk who was up next,

“I heard you don’t sing. It looked like they are planning on highlighting the fact that you’re going through a survival program without singing. You don’t need to receive lessons, right?”

“No.”

“Fine. You can watch from the side. It’ll help to watch too since these are the kids you’ll be competing against.”

Jun Hyuk had already been watching the other contestants’ vocal training with interest. Singing with accurate pronunciation was the same as making the correct sound with an instrument.

First, there was only correcting pronunciation. As soon as they were given lyrics, the practice room quickly became full of noise with the instructions to practice reading. They seemed like elementary school students clearly reading the text in new textbooks. It was surprising how in a room full of the noise of 11 people, Ryu Sun Hee could pinpoint any one person making even the slightest mistake in pronunciation.

However, watching this interesting scene was only for a moment and the staff quietly took Jun Hyuk out of the room after taking a sudden phone call.

“The schedule got messed up a little. You’ll have to go with me right now to record.”

“Record?”

“Yeah, do you remember the 1st mission from Star Week? Park Ki Young’s song?”

“Ah, yes.”

“We got a call that there’s no time to record it except for today. All the other kids finished recording. You need to record your guitar instrumental.”

“That’s really nothing. Anyone can just play it. Honestly, I don’t really remember how I played it.”

It was just an accompaniment without anything special. It was the type of music that even a decent guitar session man could record easily.

“Ha ha. It’s not that simple. Would we do it so easily when we’ll be releasing it for digital sales? We’re going to trim it and make it much more elaborate. I bet you’ll find it interesting once you go and try it.”

When he got to the recording studio, the song he played for the mission was already playing.

“It’s too weak. Try making it livelier.”

“It doesn’t mix with the accompaniment. And lower that. That’s right. Okay, stop it there.”

Everyone else must have finished recording their parts, but none of the people who completed the mission with him were present and five soundtracks were dancing on the recording studio monitor.

The producer who saw Jun Hyuk and staff put out his cigarette,

“Oh sorry. Can you wait a bit? Let’s start once I finish this.”

Jun Hyuk sat on the recording room sofa and watched the producer playing with all of the sounds through the equipment with interest. For an hour after Jun Hyuk arrived at the studio, they had not even finished the 1st draft of a 3 minute 40 second song.

“Uh... You see.”

Jun Hyuk began to speak when he could not take it anymore.

“Oh sorry. Will you wait just a little longer?”

“No, that’s not it.....”

Jun Hyuk jumped up from the sofa and put his hand on the monitor track,

“This, lower it by 1/7 at 77 seconds. At 96 seconds, I think you can just make this and this higher by about 3/10.”

The producer’s eyes widened at Jun Hyuk’s input,

“Did you learn sound engineering?”

“No. I saw you do it for two hours. This thing lets you see each voice, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Let’s fix it like that and try listening. The part that stands out too much should have disappeared.”

Anyone who heard a WAV file at home will know what a wave is. However, how could he pick out one point and modify it by lowering and heightening it? Even he who had been producing for 10 years could adjust the awkward parts but what Jun Hyuk was talking about was impossible. Fixing it by making by small modifications was all he could do. But how could he find exact modification figures like 1/7 and 3/10?

“Try it.”

The engineer adjusted the track as soon as the producer allowed for it. The producer’s scowling face lit up when he heard the modifications again,

“Something wasn’t right, but this was it.”

The producer realized that the broadcast station music director’s assessment of Jun Hyuk was not wrong,

“They kept calling you a genius; you really are good. How did you figure it out?”

“I just did.”

He just knows by hearing it. It was something he had heard often. It was what people with talent always said.

Chapter 49

[How do I explain that? I just know it.]

“They said you’re good at making songs but more than that, your ears are impressive. No, I guess they call you a genius because you’re good at everything?”

The producer forgot about their initial plan to record Jun Hyuk’s guitar. He was calculating that Jun Hyuk as the arranger would know much better what instrument needed to be added to make the song perfect.

“What do you think? Since you heard the whole recorded song, what do you think will make it good? We were going to wrap it up with the guitar, but do you think there’s something better? I want to know your opinion.”

He was someone who had never asked another young singer or idol for their opinion during his recording sessions. His asking for an opinion meant that he was not looking at Jun Hyuk as another teenager, but had accepted him as a musician.

The engineer who had been adjusting the console box stuck out his tongue in surprise. That perfectionist was discussing music with this young child? The producer had never even asked him for his opinion during the three years they had worked together.

“Um, it has a very different feeling from when we performed in during the mission.”

“Of course. We made it better to match the recording standard. The other kids recorded for over 12 hours.”

“We did it with an acapella feel during the mission... I played the guitar to bring out the rhythm. Now I think it’d be better to put in a percussion than the guitar. Something light with an airy touch to it.”

“A percussion you say... Sounds good. You said lightly?”

“Yes.”

The picture of Park Ki Young’s song being reborn as a perfect acapella song was

engraved in the producer's head.

"Good, then let's hear the piano instrumental."

The producer looked excited with anticipation. He had heard that Jun Hyuk's piano was a gem. He had checked that Jun Hyuk had an ear for music, and he would be able to confirm the extent of his talent once he saw his performance skills.

"Excuse me? The piano?"

"Yeah. There's a Finkl song that you played in a jazz version, right? That. I saw the recording."

"But Nam Seung Hee sang that song."

"No, not that. You know the one that you played casually as a guide before Nam Seung Hee sang it for you? I'm talking about that one. Honestly, the version with Nam Seung Hee took away from the piano. The instrumental alone was much better."

"Are we recording that too? I don't even remember it... because I played it on the fly."

The producer burst out laughing at Jun Hyuk scratching his head,

"Seemed like it. Ha ha. That's the zest that makes it so you can't help but fall in love with jazz. Music expressing the emotion of that moment. What do you think? Are you in the mood to play piano now?"

The producer had felt it when the broadcasting station gave him the recording of Jun Hyuk on the piano. There was fluttering of attraction to someone of the opposite sex. But there was no way that emotion would reappear in a dingy basement recording studio drenched in the smell of cigarette smoke.

"I think it'll be a little difficult."

Jun Hyuk was fascinated by the machines that could control sounds. He was more curious about how much the machines could alter sounds than he was interested in playing the piano.

"Right? Then let's do this; there's going to be an electric piano at the dorm. Keep in mind that the keyboard weight is set for an upright piano. Play it when you're in the

mood. There's a recording function on that, so don't forget to record it."

When Jun Hyuk left, the sound engineer finally opened his mouth,

"Teacher, why are you so amiable to that kid? It's a little weird today after seeing kids tense up in front of your charisma."

"From now on if you see that kid again, be nice to him and be friendly. Got it?"

"What? Why?"

"There's going to be a day when it'll be a huge advantage to your career that you ever worked with him. He's on a completely different level from other kids who come on these audition programs."

As such, Jun Hyuk's talent began to be recognized by the people creating and controlling the music behind the stage before the people on the stage.



On the 10th day of dormitory life, Judge Lee Sung Chul visited the dorm. This moment was like a much needed rain during a drought as the contestants had been weary of their monotonous schedules of daily fitness and vocal training.

The pizza Lee Sung Chul brought – though it was for product placement – disappeared quickly because the young children had only been eating the chicken breast and salad meals that the trainers brought.

"Now the 2nd episode aired. You're curious?"

"Yes. How did it go?"

"How do you think it went?"

"Jun Hyuk is totally famous now, right?"

"Huh? Oh, Jun Hyuk? He's a hot topic."

Lee Sung Chul glanced over at Jun Hyuk who was scarfing down his pizza, but quickly looked away. It was true that Jun Hyuk had become a hot topic, but it was with a

completely different type of issue that what these kids who were cut off from the outside were thinking of. On top of that, it was with obscene content created for a dirty ulterior motive.

Lee Sung Chul quickly brushed off the guilty mood. The camera was filming. They needed to film happy and animated young children.

“Once the remaining four elimination rounds are aired, it’s the live broadcast in five weeks. It’s the stage where you guys will have to sing live. In front of an audience.”

Live stage. The first moment to becoming a star was when the public was focusing their attention. Just thinking about it made their hearts beat faster.

“The people who go on all six live stages are the winner and runner-up. I’m really curious as to see who will stay alive.”

None of the contestants had been told by their agencies when they would be eliminated. The only thing they were told was ‘Do well no matter what.’ There was also the threat that they would not be left alone if they were eliminated early on.

“The reason why I came today is the mission song for your first live broadcast. Don’t you want to know what song you’ll be singing?”

24 sparkling eyes pointed to Lee Sung Chul’s mouth.

“The first theme is a song of your choosing. We’re going to make a stage that shows all of your skills. Except pop. You have to leave that for the next round. This may be a disadvantage for the people who don’t have a strong command of Korean, but you still have five weeks left in which you can overcome that with practice.”

A song of their choosing was the easiest mission. The fact that they could choose the genre they wanted to do. They did not have to be able to perform all genres. Everyone sighed in relief.

“While I’m here, I’ll give you guys a tip. There are many ways to sing. A song that’s good no matter who sings it. A song that’s easy to sing without high or bass notes. This doesn’t show a singer’s advantages or disadvantages. It’s safe.”

No one wanted to sing a song that was safe and did not reveal any advantages or disadvantages. This was not a concert. Coming up to the top 12 meant that everyone

lived with a knife by their hearts. Unless there was a competitor who made a big mistake, the person who took the safe route would be the first to be eliminated.

“The second is to cover all of your shortcomings with overwhelming vocals. With this, you can’t hear minor mistakes because you’re surprising the audience.”

Since coming into the dorms, Kwak Hye Sung’s face brightened for the first time as he had explosive vocals. He had more confidence in his vocals than he did in his jawline.

“The third is that there’s a singer who clearly shows his emotions. This also means that he has a good tone. This can be done with a good that perfectly matches his tone.”

That damned word. Tone.....

There were a few people who became frustrated after going through the qualifiers. It did not seem like they were very talented singers, but their singing was easy to listen to. This was the person who was born with a good tone. Though it was unfair that the average person had to make hundreds of times the effort a gifted person does, what could one do? This was a cruel survival competition.

“Figure out what your fortes are and prepare a stage where you can present that personal weapon of yours.”

Lee Sung Chul pat everyone’s shoulders in encouragement and left the dorm. The production staff started to go over the details of what they needed to prepare next.

It was not surprising anymore. They were embarrassed that they had believed the next mission song was a free choice even for a second.

“Everyone looks like they ate something sour, but stop frowning. It’s not that bad.”

The staff could understand why the kids were upset. It took a long time to become used to this world where the inside and outside were different.

“The first mission is a free choice song, but it’s not a completely free choice. You know the reason, right?”

The issues with copyrights, royalties, et cetera were complicated. They had heard this too many times.

“Starting tomorrow, when you’re done with your health and vocal lessons, you’ll separate into teams with three people. When you go to the recording studio, you’ll work on choosing your song, arranging and practicing it, RM recording, and sound recording. Now, you’ll be working with the producer.”

When they heard the word producer, they realized that the competition was really starting.

“Since there’s a whole month left, wouldn’t it be difficult if you spent that whole time practicing one song since you have to sing a different song every week? That’s why we have everything set until the 3rd stage.”

Could they really sing three songs when they have to go up to the top 8? Everyone gulped.

“Don’t think that it’ll be a waste of time for the people who don’t make it to the third week. We’re thinking of making a special stage to broadcast. Use everything you practice. Um... for the second mission, you’ll do songs by the four judges. Of course you’ll consult with a producer for this as well.”

Now was the time to say the hardest part. It reeked of money.

“Third is the idol special. Hey! Don’t frown over there.”

The production staff saw that a few people grimaced at the mention of idol singers. There were people who had a prejudice against idols. They were held in conceit and thought that they were pursuing a higher standard of music.

“I know there are people here who don’t like idols. However, the public likes idols. This is show business. The stardom that you all want so much is the main point of show business.”

Under the animosity toward idols was jealousy. The kids who succeeded on video and not audio. They did not try to understand the sweat and tears that came before the video success.

“If you want to work on only the music that you like, you have to leave. You can walk the path of a musician instead of a star.”

These kids gathered here were no different. They were of the same classification. They

came out on this survival program to become stars, not musicians.

“Lastly, we’re going to assign producers... Listen to your producers and you’ll get good results since they’re all first class. They’re also going to change every mission. Don’t complain about who got a good or bad producer and don’t blame the producers for who had a good or bad result.”

The production crew announced the four producers along with the three people who were assigned to each.

Chapter 50

Jun Hyuk was put in the same group as Nam Seung Hee and Kwak Hye Sung, and went to the recording studio.

“Oy, welcome. I’m Jo Hyung Joong.”

Jo Hyung Joong was in his mid 40s and at one point had established his name as a hit song maker with over 200 songs registered in the Copyright Association. He was a composer and famous producer.

He had a gentle impression and as he made coffee, he took the time to get to know the three rookies better,

“Seung Hee, you like hip hop?”

“Yes, teacher.”

“You didn’t do hip hop in the qualifiers, right? You sang a ballad.”

“Yes. There wasn’t a hip hop song in the mission songs.”

“If you’re a hip hop mania, there’s a hip hop audition program but why.....”

“That’s... My agency.....”

“Ah, you have an agency?”

“Yes, I’m in JYS Entertainment. I’m just a trainee. It’s my third year.”

A slender girl whose voice was fit for singing ballads but she liked hip hop. There was no doubt JYS liked her for her slender body and fresh face, not her ballad or hip hop.

“Well that still means you’ve gotten recognition since you’re in one of the big 3 agencies.”

Kwak Hye Sung looked dejected at the talk of agencies.

“I heard Hye Sung doesn’t have an agency yet.”

“Yes that’s correct.”

“Have you thought about why an agency hasn’t gotten in contact?”

“Because I’m fat?”

Kwak Hye Sung rubbed his bulging stomach. He had lost 2 inches over the last 10 days that had been no different from fasting. His expression remained dark though.

“Hey, your self-criticism is harsh. The reason is simple. They haven’t been drawn to you yet.”

“Are you saying I don’t have charm?”

“That’s right. I saw the tapes for all of the elimination rounds. Anyone would agree that you have great vocals.”

Jo Hyung Joong gave him a thumbs up,

“Your range is amazing... but that’s it. Your high notes and control of your voice can be advantages since there is a lot of music that you can execute. But music isn’t about who can go higher or who can be louder. There’s an emotion in the song. You need to express that. You’re lacking a bit in that area.”

His faults that a famous producer had specifically picked out. Kwak Hye Sung could not lift his head.

“Hey... cheer up. You still have a lot of time left. And you have two really strong weapons. Let’s use those weapons to make a stage full of emotion. I’ll help you.”

Jo Hyung Joong smiled warmly at Kwak Hye Sung whose face had brightened and looked at Jun Hyuk,

“So you’re Jun Hyuk. Hey, you’re as good looking as they said. With that face, you would do better as a model or actor than as a singer.”

Jo Hyung Joong thought that if the votes were done fairly, Jun Hyuk would get tons of votes just by standing on the stage.

“But I heard that you don’t sing. Why?”

“There are a lot of good singers. I just need people who will sing the songs I make well.”

“Ha ha. That’s the mind of a typical composer. Okay then, who do you wish would sing your song?”

“Um... Adele, Marvin Gaye, Floor Jansen of Nightwish, John Mayer, Eva Cassidy, Thomas Cloverope, and...”

“Hey, that’s too ambitious. Ha ha. There aren’t any Korean singers?”

“Of course there are. Lee So Ra, Kim Chang Hwan, Lee Sun Hee, Jeon In Kwon when he debuted, Kim Gun Mo 10 years ago...”

“What? Kim Gun Mo 10 years ago? So not the Kim Gun Mo now?”

“No. I think he’s aged a bit.”

“You think so? He’s still great though. If he meets a song that fits him, he’d be able to get the value out of it. Well... I think it’d be a good idea for you to make a song. You have no thoughts of singing on the live stage as well?”

“No, I’m going to try to stick it out with an instrumental.”

“Good. That’s cool. I’ll help you as much as I can, so try sticking it out. I have expectations to see how much you can advance.”

These were not words he was throwing out as a broadcast moment for the cameras next to him. He had heard that Jun Hyuk was only now 17 years old. It was a rarity to find a young child with such a firm sense of music. Aspiring celebrities were all hanging onto the idea of success. Jun Hyuk gave him pride.

This was enough for first meetings and they started preparing for the mission in earnest.

“Seung Hee, I chose a song fit for you but it’s a drama OST. It’s a slow song but I changed it so it’d be a little fast and light. Listen to it.”

When Jo Hyung Joong finished speaking, the person in charge of the recording studio

sound system turned on the music. The theme song from a popular drama that had aired not too long ago came from the studio speakers in a different version.

It was not a dance song, but it was youthful and light enough to incite automatic humming. The arrangement could have been perfect for a pretty and cute girl group to sing.

It seemed that with the strength of the original song's popularity and the audience's desire for lively music, everything matched up well and would bring good results.

Jo Hyung Joong saw that Nam Seung Hee looked pleased with the arrangement and turned on Kwak Hye Sung's mission song in succession.

The original version of Kim Kyung Ho's 'The People Who Make Me Sad' played from the speakers. Unlike Nam Seung Hee's song, it had not been edited in any way. Kwak Hye Sung just blinked as he could not figure out Jo Hyung Joong's intentions.

"Hye Sung can easily sing this song, right?"

"Yes."

"Seeing your expression, looks like you're wondering why this song wasn't arranged."

"Oh, yes... because the original song came out all of a sudden."

"The tone of your voice is the arrangement itself."

"Excuse me? My tone?"

He did not understand yet. Jo Hyung Joong just laughed as if this appearance was amusing.

"The arrangement is unnecessary because they both have extreme vocal tones. On top of that, it's possible to dominate the stage with his overwhelming vocals which is his advantage."

In contrast to Kim Kyung Ho's sharp vocals was Kwak Hye Sung's thick and heavy voice. Jun Hyuk who had been still expressed Jo Hyung Joong's intentions.

"That's it. Jun Hyuk and I are cut of the same cloth. Ha ha."

It had not been long since they met, but he could see the flash of talent. No explanation was necessary. He could figure out a producer's motives just by listening to the music. Producers could work comfortably if singers had as much sense as Jun Hyuk did.

"It'll be easy for Hye Sung to practice. There, will the two of you go and start practicing? I think my talk with Jun Hyuk is going to take some time."

Chapter 51

Jo Hyung Joong needed to choose a song for Jun Hyuk to perform without singing. Jun Hyuk was not a simple aspiring singer, but a performer. He had accepted Jun Hyuk as a musician whose tastes needed to be respected and that he could not just be thrown a repertoire.

When Nam Seung Hee and Kwak Hye Sung went into a small room in the recording studio, Jun Hyuk showed interest in the studio equipment he had been squinting at,

“Teacher, can you make sounds even without an instrument just by using this machine?”

“Yeah, you can make almost every sound. If you prepare MIDI operations with the master keyboard, you can make the sounds with programs. You can’t bring out a great performer’s emotion or technique though. If you can’t do as well as the machine you’re a lower class performer, middle class if you’re similar, and A class if you’re much better.”

“I see.”

Jun Hyuk seemed to be disappointed that perfect music was impossible with a machine.

“Why? Are you interested? I guess you want to try producing now?”

“Ah, that’s not it. A few days ago, I was at a different studio to record a mission song from the qualifiers... and I saw them fixing the music and making new sounds.”

“That’s right. Studio equipment can do just about that much.”

“I was just wondering. I was thinking I could make the symphony I wrote, but I guess that’s impossible.”

“What? Symphony?”

“Yes. I’ve made a few, but I always wanted to be able to hear one of them. There’s no orchestra willing to perform a symphony that I made.”

Jo Hyung Joong remembered a call he had with judge of Tomorrow's Star, Yoon Jung Su.

[A kid named Jun Hyuk is in your group, right?"]

[Yeah, why? You know him?]

[Watch him with care. He might be an amazing genius.]

This was not the 18th century. It was not an era when teenagers tried to compose symphonies and write sonatas.

It was an era when a few teenagers these days trained diligently to play the music that was created in the 18th century.

But here was a teenager who made a symphony without ever receiving proper education or training in classical music.

"Did you bring your score? For the symphony?"

It did not matter if Jun Hyuk's symphony was not a masterpiece. Jo Hyung Joong did not care if Jun Hyuk had just written something basic. The fact that he had written music for dozens of instruments that would have to play for 30-40 minutes was talent itself.

"The scores are at home. Why? Do you want to see them?"

"Of course. A symphony at your age? I can't believe it. What's the title?"

"I didn't give it a cool title like with old classics. It's just Symphony No.1 in A Major."

This side of him was just a teenager. It showed that he wanted to show off his music.

"Ha ha. I guess if someone were to go through your works later, there would be several Op."

"Is that what would happen? Ha ha."

"Then I guess you have to make your second piece?"

“No. The new one has to be No. 5 since I already made four. Three aren’t that good though. Even I can tell that I was trying too hard with those.”

Jo Hyung Joong had to wrestle with his work for at least a month to make a pop song that went just over three minutes. The work itself for a symphony was different. Moreover, for four symphonies. Even if they were rubbish, it was important that he had written four.

On top of that, one of them was good enough that he wanted to hear it performed. How did he have to understand this?

This was not the end. Jun Hyuk’s continued boasting brought him from being surprised to shocked,

“I only really like one of the symphonies, but I like most of the ariettas I made for the piano and violin.”

“What? Are you saying that you’ve written other songs?”

“Yes. For piano songs... um... I think I have 20? I have around the same for the violin too.....”

While Jun Hyuk was trying to count the number of pieces he had on his fingers, Jo Hyung Joong’s jaw dropped.

He had heard that it had only been two years since Jun Hyuk started music. The reality was that there had to be less than 10 people in Korea who composed 20 songs even after majoring in classical music.

“How many songs have you made until now? Is that it?”

“No. I’m just telling you about the classical... 70 or 80 for pop music? Of course the ones I actually like don’t make up half of them.”

“I’m sure you have scores for all of those as well?”

Pop music composer Jo Hyung Joong wanted to see those scores immediately.

“Yes, they’re all at home. I wanted to toss the ones I didn’t like, but my boss told me I can’t do that.”

“Your boss? Oh, at the cafe you work at?”

“Yes. Though I hardly do any work.”

“Aren’t you working while you eat and sleep there?”

“I do eat and sleep there but I don’t work. All I do is clean and open the doors in the morning, and close the doors and clean at night. I spent the rest of my time in the practice room my boss made for me in the basement writing songs and playing music.”

“You even had a practice room? What instruments did you have?”

Jun Hyuk became excited as soon as Jo Hyung Joong asked about the instruments. He had only the best, so that was of course something to brag about,

“For drums, he set TAMA and SABIAN. Fodera for bass, and for the electric guitar, I have a PRS (Paul Reed Smith), Custom, and two James Tayler BuringWaters. Yamaha for the piano.”

Jun Hyuk was listing instruments that would be in a professional band.

“What? You’re saying you have all of those?”

“Yes. And the AV receiver in Yamaha while the amp is MESA/BOOGIE). Oh right, the speaker was normally for the cafe but my boss gave it to me. He said it was something really expensive.”

“Wow! That’s amazing.”

“Yes. My boss prepared everything for me saying that my instruments and equipment needed to be expensive and good.”

This kind of investment for one teenager to have was excessive. Jo Hyung Joong began to wonder what kind of person the cafe owner was. How could a man who was being torn apart on the internet as some villainous slave driver be willing to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on one teenager no matter how talented he seemed to be? It did not make sense.

“Typical. You can’t believe what you read on the internet.’

Jo Hyung Joong began to feel bad for the cafe owner whose face he did not even know.

As Jun Hyuk carefully raised a question to Jo Hyung Joong who had been lost in thought, he forgot all about the cafe owner,

“Teacher, will you take a look at my score?”

“Your Symphony No. 1?”

“Yes. I’ll get it from my dorm tonight.”

“Hm... yeah. Let’s see it. I’m actually not an expert in classical, but don’t you think it’s a good song if I say it is? If it’s so good that even someone who isn’t an expert says it’s good? And if I can, I’ll show that score to someone I know in the classical field.”

Jun Hyuk’s eyes widened when he said that he would show the score to someone in the classical field. It could be the first chance to have his music assessed by an expert.

Jun Hyuk knew Yoon Kwang Hun had limitations. Yoon Kwang Hun’s understanding of music was incomparable to the average person, but it stopped at that of a music lover and mania.

Yoon Kwang Hun himself knew his own limitations and evaluated Jun Hyuk’s music less and less. If he could get the opinion of an expert, he could verify if he really had the talent that Yoon Kwang Hun kept assuring him of.

Chapter 52

Jo Hyung Joong who had been watching an excited Jun Hyuk saw the sign the VJ was giving him and brought out the mission song,

“I chose something because I heard you play the piano well. What do you think about this song? I think it could be great if you arrange this into a piano song. You can put in some orchestration too.”

The song Jo Hyung Joong had selected was the OST ‘From the Sun to the Boy’ from Shin Hae Chul’s animation ‘Soul Cavalry Lazenca’.

“Have you heard this song?”

“No. I’ve heard Shin Hae Chul’s other albums but this is a first.”

“Really? Then listen to the original first.”

When the elaborate introduction came out of the CD player, Jun Hyuk moved naturally with the rhythm. It was a good choice. It was a song full of the trademark heaviness and pomp of Shin Hae Chul’s experimental band N.EX.T. It was like rock opera.

When the song ended, Jun Hyuk opened his mouth slowly,

“Teacher, I would like to do a different song.”

“Huh? A different song? Why? You don’t like this one? It would sound really good as a piano instrumental. The audience could enjoy it even if it’s an instrumental with the original’s orchestration in the background.”

Jo Hyung Joong looked at Jun Hyuk with disbelief and brought up the rule that they had to abide again,

“Haven’t you heard? There are issues with copyrights. If we change the song now, the staff has to go get the rights to that. There’s also a problem of royalties. It’s hard.”

“Then you’re saying it’s okay as long as there are no copyright issues?”

“Right. Oh, are you thinking of doing an original song? Ha ha.”

“Well...”

“Want to hear me out first? During a live performance, if an audience full of young people hear an instrumental they don’t know, they’re just going to sit there. You won’t get any response. There’s no producer who will air that on TV.”

It was hard for anyone to respond to music heard for the first time. Even if the audience reaction were to be edited, it could not be done in a natural way to hide the awkwardness. The live stage had to be fun.

“It’s not an original song... It’s a song from about 300 years ago, but would the copyright still be an issue? It’s a song that young kids all know, too. It’s famous and has been played in many different versions.”

“What? Are you thinking of a classic?”

“Yes. I was thinking of doing Pachelbel’s Canon. Since there isn’t a copyright, the producer and staff don’t need to worry.”

Jo Hyung Joong fixed his glasses as if trying to hide his frustration. As Jun Hyuk said, anyone would know the song just by listening to the introduction. It was overplayed though.

“Jun Hyuk, that song is already famous for people like George Wilson and Lee Galloway. And if you want to perform classical, you can go on a concurs. You’re going out on a competition for popular music.”

“Not the piano. I’ve tried making two versions. The original is three violins but... the first version is three guitars instead of violins. The second is a rock version like the ones you see on YouTube. I wanted to do it like that.”

“Change the violins to guitars.....?”

Three guitars. There was nothing to expect if he was just switching the violins to guitars. The rock version of Guitar Kids on YouTube was good, but there was too much of that as well. If you search Canon on YouTube, there were more videos of the song done in electric guitar than there were of the classical version.

Jo Hyung Joong did not like how Jun Hyuk was thinking and he did not bother to hide it,

“Jun Hyuk, the song is good. I’m not saying it’s bad. As much as it’s a famous oldie, there’s nothing new. I don’t know how you’ll make the new version, but you won’t be able to show your own creativity.”

The VJ who had been silently filming the two spoke carefully,

“Teacher, what if we try hearing Jun Hyuk play it?”

The VJ wanted to film Jun Hyuk play his two versions of Canon and Shin Hae Chul’s ‘From the Sun to the Boy’ to make more material for the broadcast.

Jo Hyung Joong had forgotten that the camera was filming everything and that this was all content to go on air. It seemed like a good idea to try listening to everything since they still had a lot of time.

“Um... Should we? It wouldn’t be bad to listen to everything and choose then, right?”

Jun Hyuk nodded.

“I’ll objectively assess which of the three will have the most impact on the audience for the first stage.”

Jun Hyuk went into the recording booth and sat in front of the electronic piano instead of the guitar. The VJ focused the camera on him and looked confused,

“Jun Hyuk, I thought you said it was a guitar version?”

“I’ll play From the Sun to the Boy first. I only need to play the piano once, so let’s finish this first.”

Jo Hyung Joong was at a loss for words. He had said that it was his first time listening to the song. He was changing a song he had heard for the first time into a piano instrumental. If he was able to do this, he was in fact the genius that Yoon Jung Su had said he was.

While Jun Hyuk played the piano, the VJ and sound engineer were puzzled and Jo Hyung Joong who had been frozen began to smile widely when the song was ending.

Yoon Jung Su had an eye for people. His eye for seeing talent was unmistakable.

Jo Hyung Joong's smile did not disappear until Jun Hyuk finished his song and came out of the recording booth,

"Jun Hyuk, the music stops too much."

The sound engineer had been wondering the same thing. The running time of the song was over five minutes, but there were too many parts where Jun Hyuk stopped and the piano did not even play for four full minutes.

"I thought you said you wanted to put the orchestration in this song. Since it's not a piano solo... I matched it to the orchestra."

Yoon Jung Su was wrong. It was not that 'He could be a genius'; he was a genius.

Chapter 53

Jo Hyung Joong could not spend all of his time on Jun Hyuk. He needed to listen to the two people practicing with zeal in the next room.

“Jun Hyuk, let’s work together again tomorrow. Can you make a score for the orchestra that goes along with the piano song you just played and bring it?”

“Yes, I’ll write that too.”

“Okay. Then watch other people practice here. You can watch the MIDI operations you’re interested in.”

They were not recording formal tracks. They needed to get used to their voices in the mic and practice their mission songs thoroughly.

The future stars dragged home their bodies exhausted from practicing until it was night. They had just completed their schedules that were packed from 7am to 10pm. They could not even go to sleep right away. They needed to show the vocal trainer and producer something better the next day. They needed to find what they were lacking.

Jun Hyuk sat at the desk and started writing out scores. Kwak Hye Sung watched enthralled as the notes filled the pages.

“Jun Hyuk, is this classical?”

“No. It’s an arrangement of the orchestra that’ll go in my mission song.”

“Looks complicated.”

“This is pretty simple... I’m going to use around 16 instruments, so it’s not that complicated.”

“I’m jealous. Really.”

Jun Hyuk put his pen down and looked at Kwak Hye Sung,

“What do you envy?”

“Your talent. Not everyone can create a song that a 16-person orchestra will play.”

“Not everyone can sing like you sir do.”

“You’re calling me sir again. Oy, forget it.”

Jun Hyuk did not use the nominals ‘brother, sister’ that everyone in the dorms used comfortably. Older men were ‘sir,’ ‘there’ or ‘excuse me’.

Jun Hyuk made everyone uncomfortable because it was difficult to become friendly with him, but they gradually became used to interacting with him at a distance.

“Anyway, what good is it if my range is wide. Teacher Jo said it too, I can’t bring out the emotion in the lyrics.”

The emotion in lyrics... Kwak Hye Sung saw Jun Hyuk smirk and spoke,

“Why are you laughing? Is it weird?”

“I guess you understand all of the lyrics of a pop song? Even when it’s in English?”

“That’s not it.”

“But you still like the song. There are times when we become so emotional we cry even if we can’t understand the lyrics. The lyrics are a problem for later.”

Kwak Hye Sung went next to Jun Hyuk in order to hear him well while Lee Hae Jun laid on his bed pretending not to listen.

“Have you seen Shawshank Redemption?”

“The movie? The one with Tim Robbins?”

“Yes. The one where he comes out with an old black man.”

“I saw that. It was really good.”

“In that movie, the main character turns on opera in the prison broadcast studio. The

soprano duet so everyone in the prison can hear.”

“Oh... That scene?”

Kwak Hye Sung remembered the scene where all of the prisoners stared at the speakers.

“Do you know what that song is?”

“Mozart?”

“Yes. It’s ‘Letter Duet’ from Mozart’s opera ‘Marriage of Figaro’. What did you think of it?”

“Wow- it was just like the movie itself. The melody... angels, freedom... that kind of feeling?”

“Right. There’s a narration by the old black man as that music comes out, ‘That song must be about freedom. It was like birds had left their cage and flew over the prison walls, freedom...’.”

Kwak Hye Sung was taking in Jun Hyuk’s every word. Even Lee Hae Jun had gotten up at some point and was sitting at the edge of his bed to listen.

“But do you know what those lyrics really mean? That duet is like this; it’s a scene of a countess speaking as a maid writes out the letter. That’s why the title is Letter’s Duet.”

“Letter?”

“Yes. There’s really nothing to the subject matter. ‘Under the pine tree in the bush’ ‘Pine tree?’ ‘Yes pine tree’ ‘Oh, pine tree’ ‘You understand?’ Stuff like that.”

“What? The lyrics are like that?”

“Yes. There’s no meaning. That’s all. Something about winds from the mountains surrounding the pine tree...”

“You don’t say.”

The thought that that beautiful song is just about a letter to meet under a pine tree. Kwak Hye Sung felt like a fantasy had come shattering down.

“It’s far from the emotions of freedom, angels, and wings.”

Kwak Hye Sung looked bewildered but could understand what Jun Hyuk was trying to say.

“So what I’m saying is to understand the sound before the lyrics. A singer is a sound. If the melody is great and that sound for that melody is good, people are bound to be impressed.”

“Use your voice? Hm.....”

“Why sing if you’re going to rely on the effect of the lyrics? You would just recite a poem. Don’t you think so?”

Kwak Hye Sung was beginning to understand what Jun Hyuk was saying. He even thought he might have wasted his time being satisfied with his ability to hit high notes and having a wide range in the past.

Jun Hyuk looked at Kwak Hye Sung frowning and spoke,

“Sir, do you want me to tell you how you can get to the first stage?”

“Really? What is it?”

“Get them with a high-pitch. Like a soprano.”

“Soprano?”

“Yes. Go between high notes and falsettos... You have to show the bass too, right? But instead of hitting the melody with the heavy tone, get that melody with a moderate tone and a wide range.”

To Kwak Hye Sung, it did not seem like this advice would be helpful,

“Whew... Do you think that’s possible?”

“Everyone is going to think that your sound is like a big iron rod. But it would be as if

you are jabbing at people with the tip of a sharp fencing epee. They'll be impressed and they'll be seeing a different side of you. I'm pretty sure the judges will be surprised too. Then the game's over."

"But I can't do what you said. I'm not good with the high-pitch notes and falsetto."

"There's still a lot of time left. And you have a really good vocal trainer, Ryu Sun Hee. Anyway, that's all for my opinion."

Jun Hyuk turned his chair and picked up the pen on the desk again.

"Uh... Jun Hyuk. Who do you think is the best?"

Lee Hae Jun who had only been listening to Jun Hyuk and Kwak Hye Sung's conversation had approached them and spoke carefully.

They had not spoken since they got here and Lee Hae Jun had addressed him for the first time. But he was using informal speech.

He did not know how old Lee Hae Jun was but they looked to be the same age, so he thinking of throwing a punch at first calmed down when he thought of his boss' warning.

Lee Hae Jun thought that Jun Hyuk was not responding because he was thinking of his response.

"Let's see. If we're looking at singing skills alone, Jessie?"

"Oh, Jessica?"

"Yeah. But that girl with the braces... Who is she?"

"Jang Na Rae?"

"Yeah. She improves so quickly I think she'll be the winner in the end."

"Jang Na Rae improves quickly?"

Kwak Hye Sung stepped in because he was surprised by Jun Hyuk's words.

“She improves a lot every day during the vocal lessons. And her tone becomes more and more polished with vocal tuning.”

The unexpected Jang Na Rae would grow ominously. That meant there was another strong competitor. It was not something that Lee Hae Jun had wanted to hear,

“She can’t get that good in a month.”

“Why is it one month? It’s one month until the main starts, but an additional six weeks until the last round. She’ll grow even more during that period since she’ll be experiencing the real stage. And she’s learning from a producer right now. If they go against each other today, Jessica will win, but in two months, Jessica can’t keep up with braces.”

Lee Hae Jun had not thought of the real live stage. Could Jang Na Rae beat Jessica in a matter of two months? They could not know whether Jun Hyuk’s prediction would be right or wrong. What does this kid who even the judges call a genius think of him? Lee Hae Jun was becoming curious.

He spoke again carefully,

“What you do think of me?”

Chapter 54

“You? I don’t know.”

“.....”

He clenched his fists at Jun Hyuk who had thrown the words as if annoyed before turning his back on him. It made him mad enough that a kid a year younger was being so rude, but he could not take the insult that Jun Hyuk was acting as though he was not worth thinking of.

Lee Hae Jun was better at enduring than he was at singing. He had endured five years of the strident trainee life. He relaxed his fists and spoke in a low voice,

“Are you saying my singing is so bad it’s not worth talking about?”

Jun Hyuk turned his chair around again,

“That’s not it. I mean I haven’t heard you sing before.”

Lee Hae Jun’s heart melted. Of course Jun Hyuk had never heard him sing.

“I’m actually preparing to debut in an idol group. I’m the main vocal there.”

“Really? Well what does it matter if you can’t sing when you’re going to be an idol? Isn’t stuff like dancing more important?”

He was experiencing this prejudice again. He was sick and tired of this prejudice. People did not realize that this trend was changing.

“It’s not. The main vocal of an idol group, especially for a boy group, is really important. That way we can be included in things like OSTs, musicals, and solo albums.”

“I’m sure it is. You’ve been a trainee for a long time, right?”

Kwak Hye Sung understood why the vocal trainer’s criticism of Lee Hae Jun had been

rare.

“Yes. Five years.”

“And you received all your vocal training?”

“Yes.”

“No wonder. That’s why teacher Ryu Sun Hee doesn’t criticize you.”

“Sing for us.”

Jun Hyuk nodded to the guitar leaning on the wall.

“Right now?”

“Yeah.”

Lee Hae Jun hesitated before taking the guitar and started to sing,

“...You’ll meet again when you miss her.....”

As Lee Hae Jun sang Buhwal’s Neverending Story, a few people from downstairs gathered at the door.

“Ooh~ Ooh~”

“Good night.”

When his song finished, the people at the door clapped and cheered for him. He hit the high notes well and he had expressed the emotions of the song almost perfectly.

“What do you think?”

Lee Hae Jun felt a little lifted by the applause and put the guitar down to look at Jun Hyuk.

“It won’t do. Just beat everyone with exact dancing. Make singing a backup.”

No one could breathe at Jun Hyuk’s harsh criticism. How could he insult someone to

their face without hesitation?

“What’s the reason? Am I that bad at singing?”

Lee Hae Jun was barely able to speak.

“Why do you sing?”

“What? What kind of question is that? Obviously it’s because I like to sing.”

“Hah. Really?”

Lee Hae Jun could not speak because Jun Hyuk laughed lightly.

He liked to sing. That was in the past. It was not like that anymore. Now, singing was tiresome, painful, and boring.

Singing?

It had been long since he had taken the road to money and fame by becoming a star. At this state, he could even become an actor if he was told that it was a faster way to become a star. Singing was not his goal but a road.

“What object do you think your singing is? It’s an object made by a technician. It’s not even an object made because they liked it but because it sells well. Tell me honestly, you’re sick of singing, right?”

“.....”

Lee Hae Jun could not respond to Jun Hyuk’s fastball and stayed silent.

“If the person singing is thinking that, how do you think the people listening feel? Music is honest. It can’t lie.”

Lee Hae Jun could not listen to Jun Hyuk anymore and left his seat. He needed to get some fresh air, or he would throw the punch.

He went outside the entrance and stood on the small grassy lawn, thinking about what Jun Hyuk said. The judges had complimented him saying that he had a well-made vocal. He found it weird that he was so affected by Jun Hyuk’s words. He was a teenager

just like him even if he was called a genius. His words would not leave his head though.

Singing was not fun.

He could not get over the radical question Jun Hyuk had asked. He was still young, but it was the first time he had been asked that.

“Hey there. Is this the dormitory for Tomorrow’s Star?”

Lee Hae Jun jumped in surprise at the voice he heard out of nowhere. He forgot about Jun Hyuk.

“Yes, but who are you? Reporters can’t come in here.”

“Ah, I’m a lawyer, not a reporter. Is Jang Jun Hyuk inside?”

Lee Hae Jun took the man’s business card. Lawyer Baek Seung Ho. Lawyer? Why would a lawyer be looking for Jun Hyuk?

“Ha ha. Don’t misunderstand. I have to speak with Jun Hyuk regarding a sponsorship contract. I can meet him, right?”

“You can’t come into the house.”

“Hey, you’re being difficult. It’s not a prison or anything. Alright. I’ll stay outside, please call him out for me. It’ll be quick.”

“Okay.”

Baek Seung Ho took out a cigarette when Lee Hae Jun disappeared into the house. How great of a broadcast did they think they were making that they locked the kids up in a place like this? He was looking at the blurry shadows of people in the windows when the front door opened and a tall, young boy came out.

“You look better in person.”

“Sir, who are you?”

“Me? I’m someone really close to Yoon Kwang Hun. First, take the phone.”

Baek Seung Ho took out his phone,

“Hey, it’s me... Okay. I just met him... You talk to him first. I’ll put him on the line.”

A confused Jun Hyuk took the phone from Baek Seung Ho.

“Hello?”

– Is this Jun Hyuk? It’s me. How are you? It’s not hard? And fun?

“Oh, boss. Yes. I’m doing well. How are you?”

– I’m good too.

“But why does your voice sound like that? Are you sick?”

– No kid. I’m just happy to hear your voice. Jun Hyuk.

“Yes.”

– You know that man you’re with right now? He’s a lawyer at a really big and famous firm.

“Lawyer?”

Jun Hyuk eyed the man smoking a cigarette next to him and kept talking on the phone.

– Yeah, so you can do whatever that man tells you to do. I trust him and he’s like a little brother, so listen to him well. You understand?

“Yes. But why? Is something wrong?”

– I said everything is fine. Anyway, have fun. And show everyone how good you are, okay?

“Yes.”

– Okay, put that lawyer back on the phone.

Jun Hyuk passed the phone back.

“Hello.”

– Tell him well. He has a temper but he’s a fast thinker. He’s not reckless like the rumors. He’s smarter than you think, so he’ll understand.

“Alright. Just leave it to me. I’m a lawyer who lives off of words. I’m hanging up.”

Baek Seung Ho hung up the phone and smiled at Jun Hyuk,

“Jun Hyuk, you’re curious as to why I’m here, right?”

“Yes.”

Baek Seung Ho searched for the articles on Jun Hyuk and Yoon Kwang Hun’s relationship on his smartphone and showed them to Jun Hyuk,

“Read them slowly. This is what’s happening outside.”

Jun Hyuk’s hand shook as he held the phone. He kept trying to touch the article, but random ads popped up as he kept missing it with his shaking fingers,

“Oh shit.”

His hand shook and the swearing was uncontrollable. After the first article, there was another.

[Jang Jun Hyuk’s Guardian Villain Boss, Closed Cafe and Ran Away? Location Unknown.]

After reading the articles for a while, Jun Hyuk’s face turned red,

“These... these assholes.....”

Baek Seung Ho took the phone out of Jun Hyuk’s hand and spoke,

“You’re angry, right?”

“...Yes.”

“What would you like for me to do?”

“Excuse me?”

He felt like he was burning up, but this lawyer was laughing with a cigarette in his hand.



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